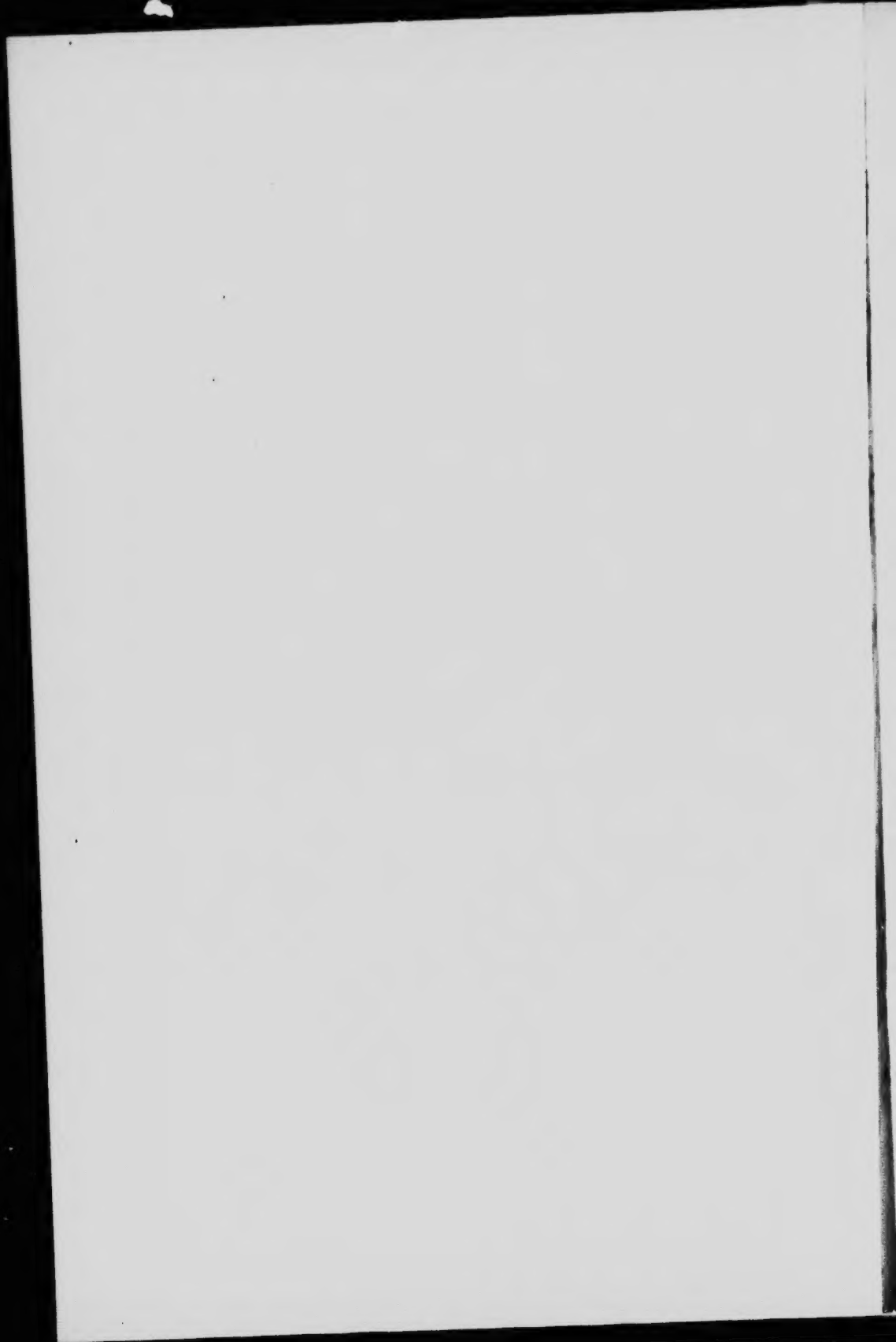


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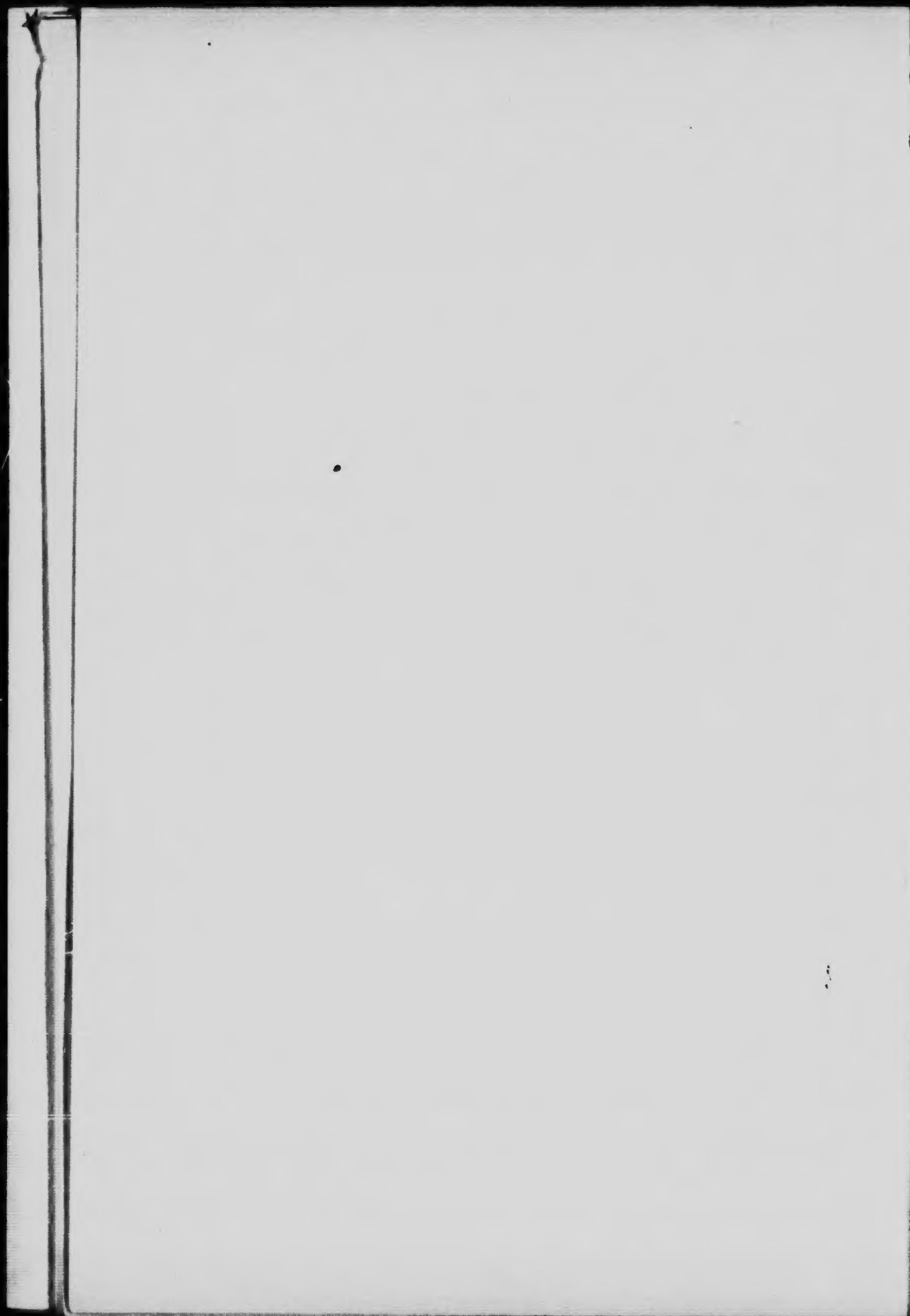
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A WHITE PASSION

**A
WHITE PASSION**

**BY
A. B. TEETGEN**

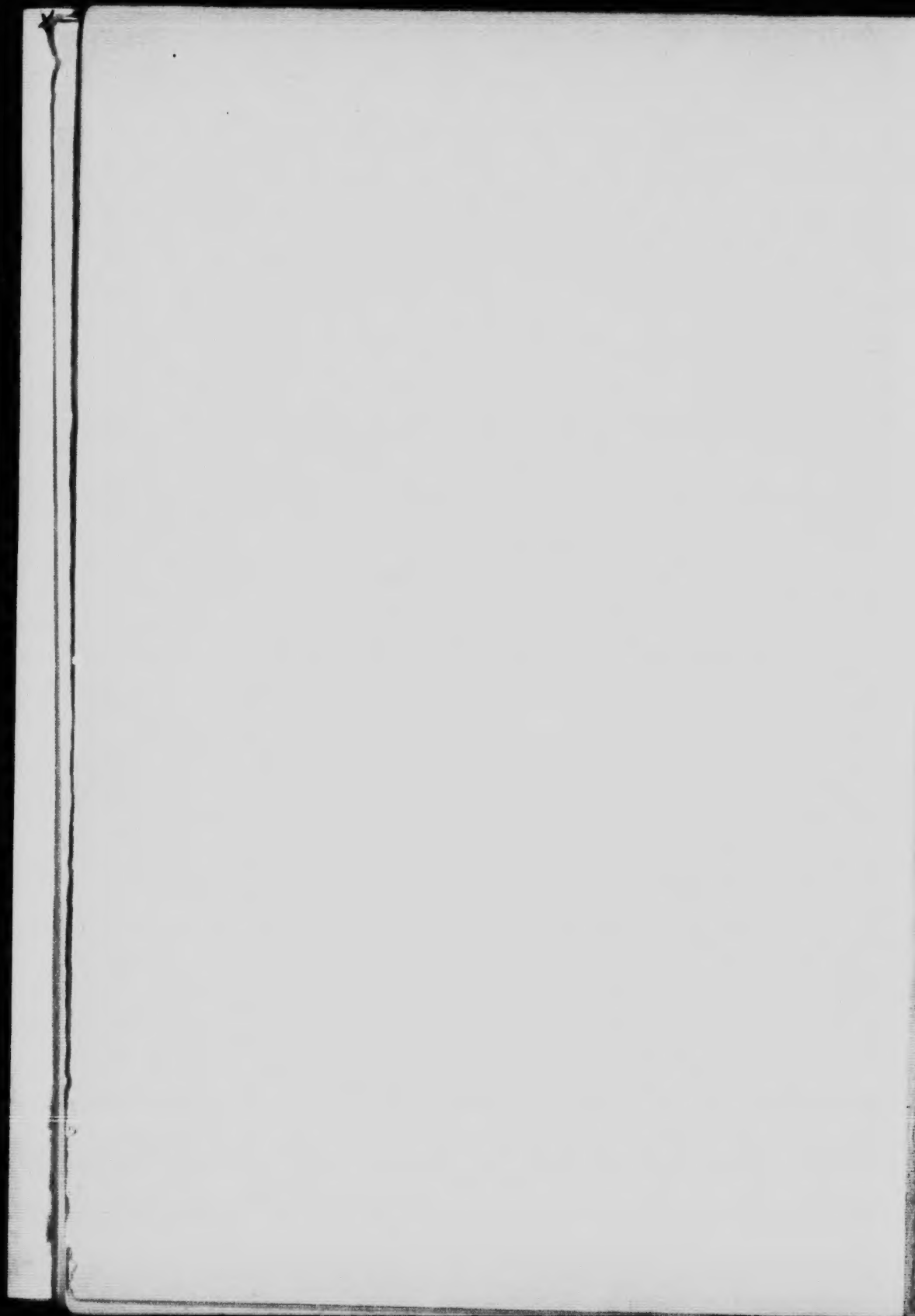
**TORONTO
BELL & COCKBURN**



DEDICATED, WITH GRATITUDE,
TO ALL THE BENEFACTORS
OF THE 'FINLAY' HOSPITAL

'FINLAY'

ALBERTA. *Dec.* 1912



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Can't you hear a voice a-calling,
From the hills and plain,
Fraught with agony appalling,
Loaded down with pain?
It's the sound of souls a-sighing,
It's the sound of women dying—
Tell me, do you think they're crying,
All in vain?

Can't you see them at their labours,
Day by weary day?
They're your sisters, wives and neighbours,
And their way's your way.
See their endless round of charing,
See their hard-won prairie faring,
Smiles that hide the soul's despairing,
Speak, and say—

Do you know the load they're bearing
Through their toil-strewn lives?
Bear the load, and others' sharing,
That's the work of wives.

They the last great toll must tender,
Service ultimate must render,
To new life their own surrender
In love's name.

All the beasts you prize and cherish,
All the brutes you feed,
How you tend them lest they perish
In their time of need.
Is the woman so much cheaper
That you do not try to keep her,
Careless—throw her to the Reaper,
Without heed?

The above lines (those in the third verse are :light' transposed) were written by G. J. Lively, a prairie farmer-poet, on the occasion of the death of one of the first patients in the 'Finlay' hospital, a young wife and mother of about twenty years. They certainly epitomise the 'argument' of the following prairie chronicle.

PREFACE

TO THE READER—CANADIAN AND ENGLISH

THE writer of the following chronicle of a prairie hamlet and of its perhaps ambitious doings, is conscious that the story loses a good deal in being cast, however slightly, in the form of a novel. She adopted this method for the reason that there were one or two points it might suffice better than another to bring out. While little save the bare scaffolding of the romance, departs in any essential from fact, many of the incidents in the story (such as the circumstances of final rescue for the Hospital) have been so adapted to its requirements that it would be misleading to take them as an exact transcript of the happenings at 'Finlay.' So also with the various individuals who come and go throughout the following pages.

It is but justice, too—as the 'Dr Liston' of the story is largely taken from the man to whom the 'Finlay' hospital owes so much, at least in its later stages—to observe that everything reasonable and to be endorsed in that individual's plans and

efforts really belongs to the prototype, while his mistakes and short-sightednesses belong rather to the second person responsible, in actuality, for the venture. For the purposes of the book the work of two people has been summed up in the experiences of one, and 'George Liston' may in consequence incur some criticism which does not properly belong to him. No one will shoulder it, as he shouldered the hospital itself, more bravely, more kindly, than the man who deserves nothing but the praise.

While there is no difficulty about transferring the high lights of the real picture to the story (and 'Alma Norway' is the only *confessed* thumb-nail sketch of them all,) the writer felt that unless her book were to be nothing but a tissue of amiable complacencies, she must somehow indicate the shadows. In actuality, these were many, and some of them very dark. Such a figure as Dr Farnworth, however, is nothing but the summary of an attitude, and of some criticisms which came from various and scattered sources.

It is, again, exceedingly difficult to write such a tale without appearing to join the ranks of those who disparage western Canada and would say a word discouraging to emigration.

Nothing could have been further than this from the writer's aim!

It would be as untrue to her own con-

PREFACE

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victions about that splendid country and real love of every mile of it from Halifax to Vancouver, as indeed ungrateful to all those private Canadian friends and Corporations who in one way or another aided her in the building of the 'Finlay' hospital, were she to make of this tale anything but a plea for those steps to be taken in the interests of the settlers and immigrants themselves, and especially of the women, which would promote the interests of immigration in the best possible way. Prairie cottage hospitals assisted by provincial government funds, run on the cheapest lines compatible with efficiency, run in the interests of nobody's pockets but the patients', would do as much perhaps as new lines of railway to attract settlers to the West.

The story is that, indeed, of an experiment, but not only of an experiment in the solution of the prairie Nursing problem.

Nothing in these pages that describes the hazards and disappointments of exclusive grain raising in a new region where cultivation of the soil has not yet become extensive enough, as in the older Provinces, to moderate the climatic conditions, is truer than the conclusion at which the farmers of the 'Finlay' district arrive in the last two or three chapters. This conversion of grain-growing land into ranching country is only one of the experiments which the prairie farmers carry out for themselves sometimes,

bidden as much by experience, as by the wisdom of the Government Experimental Farms. To describe such a revolution must not be held condemnatory of the life and 'chances' in the new Canadian West. It is used here not by any means to emphasise the ups and downs in the fortunes of the prairie Hospital but simply because in real life it was the local accompaniment of the little undertaking

Again, the writer is anxious, in case 'Emsdale' should be located, to anticipate any possible offence the account of the ambulance class might give, by an emphatic disclaimer of any intention to ridicule. Her appreciation of the comic side of things was not incompatible with all the other sentiments with which a few days' sojourn in camp imbued her, gratitude for much hospitality, and admiration for the soldierly qualities and effectiveness, to say nothing of the patriotism, of the 5,000 men who composed it. The few days' annual training which a militia army may compass every summer is not enough, of course, to bring the men up to 'regular' standard, but in no unit perhaps is the fortnight in camp felt to be all too short than in the Field Ambulance. In all the other units—the newly raised infantry regiments, the hard working batteries of artillery, the spirited horse—the wonder is that work can be so well and heartily done by men 'soft' from civilian life, and that appearances

from the military standpoint are so satisfactory in every way. The officers all recognise the need for a lengthier opportunity of training, but in a camp like that at 'Emsdale,' a big base camp, admirably planned and organised, equal in many ways to Aldershot, the manœuvres from which would compare well with those of the English Territorials, in such a camp the civilian eye sees nothing to criticise, everything to admire, and something to laugh at only in the ambulance recruits!

This is no place in which to make either the Hospital's or the writer's acknowledgements to their numerous and very good friends. But—with these few provisos—it is perhaps the place to offer them the story.

A. B. TEETGEN

'Finlay,' Alberta.

('The Green Veil.')



CHAPTER I

A PRAIRIE PRACTITIONER

It was a bitter day towards the end of October. A wind of stinging cold swept across the immense undulating panorama of the Albertan prairie, and the tangle of dry and withered herbage that fringed every shivering bluff and belt of scrub rattled desolately above the frozen tussocks of rank grass.

It looked as though the 'freeze-up' had come; as though the short Canadian summer were already a thing of the past. For three or four days the temperature had remained some few degrees below zero, and the prairie, burnt by the fierce suns of August to the semblance of a limitless sandy desert, might now take to itself at any moment that pall of snow which seemed, year after year, to reinvest the virgin land with all its unassailable reserve. For six months or more nothing but the most delicate differentiations in white, like the pictures suggested in pale washes rather than painted, by the poetic artists of Japan, would mark

the rise and fall of the country, but as yet no snow had fallen and the whole landscape ached in its bitter nakedness.

The 'fall' had been exceptionally dry. No drop of moisture had as yet converted the friable sod of the stubble fields into the iron-hard ground of mid-winter, and here and there dark specks could be descried slowly moving in the distance, for the oxen were still out ploughing. Few features marked the illimitable dun coloured wilderness save a range of softly rounded low lying hills far off against the horizon, whose blackness told the tale of some ravening prairie fire. Here and there a little column of smoke coiled slowly upwards above some burning straw pile, and not far away a huddle of log built sod-roofed buildings denoted a settler's homestead. Only the proximity of a clothes line where the frozen linen, brown from frequent washing in the tea coloured water of a slough, hung stiffly like so many bits of glass or cardboard, served to distinguish shack from granary or stable.

A solitary buggy held on its way along the trail. Ramshackle enough it looked with two shabby undersized horses harnessed to it in the straggling prairie style, and ramshackle enough it sounded, for many a spoke had been sprung in the wheels, the spring of the box lid behind was broken, and a stump of willow had caught the iron step and

wrenched it away together with one of the floor boards. Nor was the occupant of the buggy much out of keeping with it, albeit the immense fur coat he wore with the collar turned up about his face, and the heavy fur cap drawn down to his eyes, sufficiently smothered any personality he might have possessed under the semblance of a rather ill-kempt bear.

He drove along with slack lines making little attempt to check the ponies' tendency to get out of the beaten trail. They had done a good thirty miles that day, and six months' continuous work had worn the horn of their unshod hoofs almost down to the quick. They ambled forward spiritlessly enough, when their driver, estimating he had covered so many miles in a given direction, checked them to a walk, and glanced about him like a man accustomed to find his way by the points of the compass. He was trying now to locate certain illusive prairie landmarks. His practised eye soon detected what it sought—a tall willow pole stuck upright in the ground with the bleached skull of a buffalo impaled upon it. Whereupon he pulled out sharply to the right, and urging the ponies to an unwilling lope, pursued his way.

The cheerless afternoon was beginning to draw in as the buggy rattled down a rough bit of trail on the flank of a wide spreading coulée, crossed the plain below and drew up

some couple of hundred feet further on before a little shack set snugly against the rising ground on the far side of the valley.

The place betrayed no sign of life.

Nevertheless the traveller, knowing it well, made fast the lines to the rail of the dashboard and descended stiffly to the ground. He threw an observant glance at his jaded team. The poor beasts had already dropped their noses and were rustling in the frozen wire grass. A moment's reflection, and the man decided to unhitch. He unbuckled the hames and the traces, dropped the horses' headgear, and twisted the collars over their bony heads. Leaving the rest of the harness kicked into a heap underneath the buggy he led the animals to the stable—a dug-out in the hillside roughly faced with logs and roofed with sod—tumbled an armful or so of hay into the manger, and left them.

Returning to the shack he busied himself lighting a fire in the stove. Piling a handful of paper and chips into the fire box, he struck a match on his thigh and blew a wandering flame among the interstices of the roughly laid wood. Then, sweeping a miscellany of cups, plates, knives and forks on to the bare table with a readiness that denoted complete familiarity with the domestic arrangements of his absent and evidently bachelor host, he mustered some sort of a meal. The half-eaten ham pushed aside on a shelf was down in a second, and it

took scarcely longer to tumble some derelict cold potatoes into the frying-pan, full of grease from former usage, and to chop them up small with the lid of a tin of baking-powder hard by. Some tea, already in the coffee-pot, only required boiling water.

He threw aside his fur coat, then, and drawing up a chair, sat himself down before the stove, and put his feet in the oven on either side of a forgotten baking dish. A thoughtful look crept over his kindly ill-shaven face, and he brought his hand down sharply once or twice on his knee.

George Liston was a prairie doctor, and had that day made a very long round. A ruinous round for his patients, had he urged for payment, of a dollar a mile. Last night a baby had been born in a lonely log cabin away to the north and he felt anxious about the mother. She was all alone save for her husband. But none of the farm work could be suspended because a little life had suddenly dawned at the shack. The doctor himself had done all that was necessary at the moment over and above his ordinary functions and had performed both for mother and child all those first offices which they generally receive at the hands of a woman. He was used to it, but he seldom came away from these cases without being touched by the heroism of prairie wives and mothers. An odd enough figure he looked in his shabby clothes (the frayed linen and dusty

black, still clinging to some of the traditions of his profession) but no angel of Providence was ever more welcome among the widely scattered homesteads of the prairie than he, since it was never for the fads of life that he was summoned, but only for the momentous realities of its dawn or close.

He was now on his way back to the hamlet on the line of railroad whose coming three or four years ago had opened up an entirely new stretch of country for homesteading. A *détour* round by Hepburn's to see if Mrs Jim couldn't spare a day or so to go up north and look after his case, had brought Dr Liston to Gould's where he knew he could put up, and welcome, at any time. Gould, of course, was away on his quarter somewhere ploughing. Gould was not the man to lose an hour on the land just before freeze-up. It would be dark before he knocked off.

So the doctor sat and ruminated, waiting for the kettle to boil and turning over in his mind the details of a scheme that had long occupied it, and beguiled many a monotonous hour of driving on the prairie.

George Liston was an Englishman but on that account alone no more of an 'immigrant' to this particular prairie region than were the people who had come up into it from the older provinces of eastern Canada. He had belonged, at home in 'the old country,' to a middle class family numeri-

cally strong in girls, and in due course had been sent to London at considerable sacrifice on the part of his parents, to study medicine. After qualifying he went to sea, and came back at last from his third or fourth voyage to Australia as the brass-bound medical officer of one of the Orient Royal Mail liners, ready indeed to settle down in practice ashore, but with the slenderest of means to buy one. Pausing one afternoon outside the shipping offices in Cockspur Street to look at the model of a new transatlantic leviathan displayed there it occurred to him, naturally enough, to emigrate, and the mere difference in fares decided him between Canada and Australia. He had no doubt he would do well as a lumber jack or in a railway camp, or as a 'vet' if Canada had no use for him as a doctor.

He joined a 'colony' for the settlement of which an irresponsible organiser had given them to understand a large tract of land had been set aside on the line of the newest railroad, and in due time found himself no less on his beam ends than were the rest of the duped and abandoned colonists. He might have gone further afield then, and sought to establish himself elsewhere, as did all those who still retained any means, but that a practice had come to him among the remainder, and he was loath to let it, and them, go. This was four or five years back, and by now most of the newcomers had

struggled on to their feet, and a number of native Canadians from the older provinces and a good many foreigners had not only swelled the number of homestead entries for the district but had laid the foundations of another prairie town round the little depôt and water tank which represented the creative 'fiat' for it of the railroad. Money, of course, was scarce enough, and the small harvests of the first few experimental years, wrung from the untamed wilderness in the teeth of her elemental moods, did scarcely more than enable the settlers to keep up their instalment payments for the agricultural machinery without which they could have done nothing. Doctor Liston kept soul and body together by taking payment 'in kind' though it was often difficult enough to appraise the value of a lancing, a stitching, or an amputation in terms of chicken feed or pork. He had a district over a hundred miles in extent, and every year added to the number of those who had no one to look to, in sickness or disablement, save himself. The nearest Hospital was a hundred miles away to the west, and the nearest brother practitioner at first was almost as far. It was a hard life—this prairie pioneering—especially for the women!

George Liston was already past thirty and too well satisfied with work such as this for its own sake, to trouble very much now about the financial aspect of his career. He

had no doubt that the growth of Finlay would account satisfactorily enough in time for the fortunes of those associated with it. Towns were 'booming' all over the West. And in the meantime he was engaged to Sandra, a prairie rose of a girl, who required no more of him than that he would have a lean-to kitchen built on to his house in Finlay before he asked her to take over its management.

It was not of Sandra he sat and thought, however, that chill afternoon in October, but of the hospital—a sort of prairie Cottage Hospital—it had become the dream of his life to build. If only he could get his patients together under his eye 'in town,' place them in charge of a qualified nurse, and give them every chance, he could do himself infinitely better justice as a doctor, and incidentally, save their pockets as well as his time. No merely selfish design, this. Doctor Liston was meditating a sale of shares in London from which he derived less than thirty pounds a year, in order to start building. It remained to be seen what the countryside could or would do in furtherance and support of the scheme. The thing was wholly problematical among a lot of widely scattered newly settled people as much strangers even to himself as to each other. He had not yet broached the idea to the embryo 'Board of Trade' at Finlay. . . . It wanted a lot of thinking out . . . he

scarcely supposed a soul would credit any altruism in his motive—not that that mattered—but surely some sort of very low Sick Insurance plan by which the thing could be run at a nominal cost to the farmer ought to make its own appeal? Then of course the provincial Government might be approached . . . or possibly the Immigration Department . . . or the railroad people . . . The thing was full of possibilities. The zeal of it rendered him utterly careless what he ate or drank.

The latch lifted and Gould came in, a tall fellow in well-worn jean. He betrayed no surprise at the sight of his visitor.

‘I knew it must be you,’ he remarked, ‘by the team in the stable.’ His glance fell upon the table and the remnants of the other’s meal. ‘Gosh! I’ve got a couple of prairie chicken somewhere—thought I’d stuck them in the oven.’

The Doctor made sure the tin had been empty. A search soon revealed the little carcasses sprawling on their backs on the shelf. Gould consigned them summarily to the oven and apologised for the ham. He cut a corner of tobacco from a block of ‘Shamrock’ and shredded it in his palm preparatory to the deft business of filling and lighting his pipe. Dr Liston, his cap on the back of his head and hands thrust deep into his pockets, was already enveloped in

smoke enough of his own making. A long figure, like his host, he sat in his worn old red jersey, his legs well extended, and waited for Gould's pipe to draw. He was seldom the first to speak. His face was pale for that of a man accustomed to be out in all weathers ; it lit up now with humorous liking for the other.

'How goes it about the Weed Inspectorship?' he asked after a commonplace or two as to how he chanced along the trail to-day.

'Oh, I've got another fortnight to put in before the season closes,' Gould said attacking the loaf, 'and Rawlins wants me to be through before the middle of November. I told him the thrashers were keeping me hanging about here, and he said he'd see if he couldn't let me off. I suppose you haven't seen anything of them?'

The Doctor had, though. The outfit was stuck at Tupper's since a breakdown three days before. 'Jerry was hard at it "edjikating" the engine this time, but I doubt if he was much of a hand at it.'

Gould laughed.

Jerry was the local socialist whose ambition, whenever two or three men got together in school-house or pool room to discuss such provincial legislation or such municipal rulings as might have some bearing on their affairs, was, loudly thumping, '*t'edjicateyer*!'

His daughter was often out in the fields behind the oxen, the lines cast about her still childish shoulders, putting in homestead duties, while Jerry himself held forth on socialism in the village. He was known as 't'edjikationalist.' His edjikating had little effect on men too hard-working, like Gould, for discontent. The farmer opined he might as well give up looking for Tupper and the thrashers.

'There's one comfort,' he said, 'we shan't have Jerry at the meeting to-night!—the U. F. A.'*—answering Liston's glance.

'Say, Gould,' the Doctor remarked after a pause, reverting to the train of thought the other's entry had disturbed, 'what should you think at a rough guess would be the number of people all round about here, I mean including the outlying postal districts? What's the membership of the U.F.A. for instance? I've half a mind to come with you to-night.'

Gould sucked at his pipe, and found the estimate a hard one to make. A couple of hundreds perhaps—no, less than that. 'They don't all belong,' he said. 'But we ought to have a fair crowd to-night. It's a special meeting to nominate our man for the municipality. If you come along you'll see Hepburn—that will save you going there.'

'So it would. . . . Who should you say

* United Farmers of Alberta

was the best off, apart from Walker, of course?'

Why, Luke,' returned Gould thoughtfully, 'he holds a good many mortgages, and old Benson does well enough.'

Walker had come up from the States with a family of five strapping sons. Their outside fences alone were over ten miles in extent and they had never hauled a load of grain to the elevator. They shipped cart-loads of cattle away in the spring and the fall, and made \$4000 profit a year. Dr Liston's thoughts often revolved tentatively round the Walkers. Luke, responsible for a few little frame houses in Finlay, slightly differing in baldness and ugliness from the original shacks, had inaugurated what the Doctor was pleased to call in his own mind the 'post-Watkins period' of its wooden architecture. Yes, Luke and Rogers the auctioneer were good men.

'——And the poorest?' he pursued. 'Is there anyone, do you suppose, who really couldn't afford to shell out say ten dollars a year if anything worth while turned up requiring it?'

'You know Edmonds,' Gould said, 'well—I'll show you.' He reached over to a little home-made desk near at hand and found a letter. 'I got that only last month.'

It was a poor ill-formed scrawl enough desiring the Weed Inspector to refrain from reporting the writer's mustard infested

quarter. Edmonds had been four years in the country and had never reaped a crop. Sandra declared he tied his clothes on with binder twine. Hail or fire or frost had bested him every year and now the weeds were proving too much for him. Nevertheless a hieroglyphic asterisk in the corner of the letter referred to the dollar sign at its foot. 'He would have squared me,' Gould explained pointing it out, 'so even he's got money somewhere.'

Dr Liston handed the document back without comment. Another man might have asked a question, curious or interested, but this was one to whom facts in themselves conveyed much of what it might be necessary to know. He said nothing to Gould of the purpose behind his enquiries, but the receptiveness of the silence with which he received various other items of information, was sufficient indication to his companion that the 'Doc' had something in his mind, that he had come there moreover, for the purpose of this talk.

Only Gould knew more than the Doctor himself, and that in one direction, of the settlers scattered throughout the immense range of his Weed Inspectorship. He was, perhaps, the only man, not excepting the Postmaster in Finlay, whose experience could be of any assistance to Liston as yet.

'Of course there's always Ansell Carter,' he hazarded, after a thoughtful pause, 'there

isn't a man about here except Walker as well fixed as him. But I don't know as you'd count Ansell for good for much. He hasn't got much of a stake in this country so to speak, and has never bothered to get on the voters' register. He's one of these durned wheat miners, he is, and no farmer at all.'

Liston prodded reflectively in the bowl of his pipe, and put it back again slowly in the corner of his mouth.

'I wasn't reckoning on Carter, anyway,' he remarked.

Gould glanced at the other with more of interest than the subject had hitherto evoked. He wondered how far the enmity of the two men had gone, and concluded Liston was hatching some scheme of his own.

'They do say,' he observed, 'as Carter's likely to sell out if he could get anywhere near his price for the land.'

'But that isn't likely the shape it is now,' Liston objected.

'He might if this weren't a herd law country,' the Weed Inspector speculated. 'By the time you get half the farmers coming to the conclusion that mixed farming is a safer proposition than raising wheat you're half way to free range.'

The talk drifted to cattle and the task of re-stocking a district. Ranching on a big scale was the thing, Gould had come to think, for fine rolling country with coulées

and water courses like theirs, at least until such time as the men coming in could afford the experiment of wheat.

Ansell Carter had been trailing round after Sandra Dunn for the last two summers, but since her engagement to the Doctor the previous fall, no more had been heard of him in that connection. The thing was generally understood to have precipitated a feud, but so far as George Liston was concerned, the gossips of the prairie had had little to go upon.

Carter came into the district a few years previously when the Finlay country was first opened up for homesteading purposes, and filed on a quarter in the one spot where the crops so far had never failed. He had been something of a rover and an adventurer himself, but coming of a good solid farming stock 'down east,' knew exactly what he wanted in the shape of land, and was perfectly capable of picking it up. All he required was a sufficient acreage to raise crop after crop of the best grade western wheat to ship away. He never sold or intended to sell a bushel in the West.

He had made a certain amount of money in a hap-hazard way up at Stewart on the British Columbian coast about the time when a gold rush set in there reminiscent of the early days in the Yukon. The bottom of the boom fell out, for the gold, (a fact right enough), was deeply imbedded in

the quartz of those glacier-hugged mountains which vie, across the deep fiord of the Portland Arm, with the snowy ranges of the Alaskan coast, and was not to be picked up, 'placer' style, for the asking. Carter sold some land he possessed for the purposes of the newly-sprung mining town on the flats at the head of the inlet, and cleared out at an inflated profit at the psychological moment. His prairie quarter now was nothing but a second string to the bow of some of his investments in B.C. real estate, and had it not been for Sandra Dunn he would have found a hired man to put in the homesteading duties on it and work the place season after season in his stead. He might indeed have figured as a rather desirable son-in-law in Mrs Dunn's shrewd eyes were he not fifteen years older than her girl, and given every now and again to drink. But Sandra herself hated him and avoided him, and the obvious passion for her he was at few pains to conceal affronted every instinct of her clean untouched young womanhood.

Liston's declaration had saved her from the persecution of Carter's courtship.

If the Doctor speculated sometimes as to the quality of the enemy he had made in this man, or came across evidences here and there of his enmity, he was certainly far from taking Carter into his calculations with regard to the ways and means for a little hospital at Finlay. How much or how little

Gould might know of the affair down at Gopher Creek concerned him or Sandra very immaterially. In any case there was no occasion to discuss it. By the time the talk got round again to the turn Liston had given it at the outset, the Weed Inspector was thinking of men more likely to be of assistance to him than Carter.

When, later, the two of them set out for the Schoolhouse some seven miles distant where the farmers' meeting was to be held, the Doctor was inclined to think this might be an opportunity to throw out a few feelers. It was seldom more than a score of people could get together for any purpose; Gould supposed there might be about thirty to-night. Old Mr Atkins, the Chairman-Secretary, a retired sea captain who by a grim irony of fate had sunk in vain no less than twenty wells on his quarter in search of a drop of water, had put forth laborious secretarial efforts to ensure that the meeting should be a representative one. He was good at this sort of thing, loving nothing better than to make his way, a committee of one as often as not, through the intricacies of an Act, quite equally befogged by the parliamentary phraseology and the guttering coal-oil lamp.

It was singularly dark by seven o'clock. Unnoticed by the two men sitting over the stove in the shack, enormous flakes of snow had begun to come whirling down an hour previously, and the air was now much

warmer. The bitterness had gone out of it. The blackness of the night, however, with all the stars blotted from the heavens combined with the complete transformation that had come over the muffled earth, gave Liston and Gould some misgiving as to whether they could find and keep the trail. A man may lose himself on the prairie in such a night within less than a mile of his own familiar land.

Every sign of the way was already obliterated, and crossing the coulée they came to places where the snow had drifted axle deep and the buggy wheels refused to revolve. Gould had just decided to go back, remarking that none would turn out for the meeting on such a night, when they discovered they were lost. There was nothing for it but to trust to the instincts of the team. Dr Liston only realised how ready he had been to broach the subject of this Hospital to-night, by the momentary disappointment of the futile start. Before they got back to the shack he had had plenty of time to think out his scheme as he had not yet thought it out.

CHAPTER II

SANDRA

SANDRA was not much more than twenty when Dr George Liston met her first.

Oddly enough, for a lover, he always associated her with the piglets with which she was surrounded on that occasion—little merry naked-looking things, scores of them, racing madly about the meadow on the river brink. Sandra loved the pigs, as her sister Maggie loved the foals. They formed in fact the only really fluent topic of her conversation, even after he had become engaged to her.

She was tall like Mrs Dunn, her mother, and a beauty after the type of the Goose Girl in fairy stories, or the Beggar Maid. This was partly due to the overwashed and faded cotton dresses she wore, always with the rents in them somewhere that only barbed wire can make. She had the broad brow, faultlessly modelled nose and mouth and chin, of the blunter, shorter type of Greek face. If pronounced freckles had not been characteristic of Sandra, they would have had to be deplored. Her wide grey eyes were informed with a quick dumb response

to affection strangely at variance with the reserve of an intensely shy nature. Sandra in her extraordinary simplicity, not only of mind but of figure—she looked like a child of sixteen—was an incarnation of the remote freshness of the prairie, of the unsophisticated beauty of the low, softly rounded nameless hills among which she dwelt. Her crowning glory was her hair, and she wore it in immense dark braids coiled round her head until the hot summer day when she took a pair of scissors and cut it all off, and cried a minute after at her act. Dr Liston from Finlay had come along that day, too, and seen her for the first time cropped like a boy—! She remembered it well for she had dug a few swedes for him, stowed them in the back of his buggy and pointed out the trail to Babcock's.

The Dunns' quarter was in some respects the best quarter in the section, although the last to be taken up on account of so much of it being valley land through which a little river ran. At one time the glaciers which had strewn the prairies with ice-scored rocks and boulders, retreated over the immense cretaceous formations of the middle west. The seas of an age no more 'prehistoric' indeed, than that which preceded the coming of the railway line, drained away into Hudson Bay. The whole of Gopher Creek valley strewn with 'erratics,' had formed a river bed, and the wooded hills

which fringed it now, had been but river banks. The Dunns' two-roomed shack of logs and tamarack stood in the bend of the dwindled stream, and the strip of ground allotted to what Mrs Dunn called her 'garden truck' owed its enviable fertility to this fact. The wheat land stretched up the valley and there was an acre or two in flax on the hill.

Mrs Dunn herself was the strong hard-working type of woman with a fund of solid self-respect, and good traditions behind her. She had the best heart in the world, but when she came into the country alone and settled down in the shack by the river with no one to do a hand's turn for her on the farm or about the place except Sandra and the two younger children, Maggie and Bob, the fact that there had not been wanting tongues to invent an explanation for her husband's absence justly annoyed her. But she held on her way, sterling common sense allowing a natural sensitiveness to take little more notice of gossip than it deserved, and proved herself one of the best of neighbours farming folk could desire. She was too open handed, too frank of speech, not to be misunderstood in a heterogeneous prairie community. Her husband had a well-paid job in a railroad camp which meant a certain, steady income; regular instalments of it came to Finlay every month for his wife. Anxious not to forfeit a prairie holding he had filed on earlier, through inability to

complete his homestead duties, his wife had dissuaded him from hiring a man at a high wage to go and farm it, and protested that she and the children might as well live there without him, as elsewhere.

She was, indeed, as shrewd as the best of the men, and having a tongue which never learnt to consider discretion the better part of valour even after many an uncalled-for disillusionment, she bore herself as wordily and as naturally in the disaffected village as at home. At harvest time when help was a necessity if the grain were to be reaped and stacked before the coming of the snow, Mrs Dunn was as keenly on the look-out for a hired man as anybody. In fact she needed one more than her neighbours, unless she were to drive the binder herself and leave the stooking to Sandra. The influx of harvest hands so far west of Winnipeg was by no means equal to the needs of the district. Thus one day when Mrs Dunn drove into Finlay on this quest and encountered a stranger lolling on the bench outside the livery barn and heard he was looking for a job at \$50 for the month, she had her doubts about him for the simple reason that no one else seemed to have snapped him up. There was always, of course, Sandra to think of, and in a case like this her mother was not the woman to take just anyone back with her to the lonely homestead.

She made an enquiry or two.

'Objects to sixteen hours a day for a "white man,"' the butcher reported. 'I told him when I came out here first I put in twenty-four, and would have twenty-five if I could!'

So she delivered her ultimatum in a characteristic manner when climbing into the buggy at the end of the day and preparing to pull out of town.

'Why, no! I should say! You didn't suit Rummins and you didn't suit Watt,—'tain't likely you'd suit me.'

When at last she hit on Fred it was quite a different matter. This individual had come West—Ontario was his home—for a sort of holiday limited as to time only by the duration of his railway ticket, and as to possibilities only by his own infinite capacity for adventure. He was knocking up stands for wine casks at the Hotel in settlement of his bill there, when Mrs Dunn engaged him for the harvest under the very nose of the hardware storekeeper who would have given him \$60 a month to set up binders. He was a good-looking fellow and more so working about the farm with opened shirt and roughened hair than when pranked out in all the glory of collar and more or less respectable hat (at an angle) for the festivities of Labour Day.

Fred was no mere lad, but whatever misgivings George Liston may have felt on the score of Sandra and the fascinating fellow

were set at rest after an evening or so spent at Gopher Creek. He was a man in the prime of life, the one goddess of whose existence had always been his mother, that loving sensible old lady 'way back' in Ontario among her orchards and her cows and her enormous family (there were fifteen Freds) who soon became as living a reality to the Dunns, through Fred's incessant talk of her, as she was to himself. He would have brought her photo along with him in that 'valise' of his, full of odd things and carpenter's tools, but that she had refused it to him at parting lest it should make him homesick. He could remember her face just as well without that.

Fred apparently had no eyes for any girl on this side of sixty. His talk of Ontario reminded Mrs Dunn of her early married days and of one of those far off stories belonging to them.

Dunn had married a girl from the American side, but so little difference then obtained between a backwoods village of New York State whence she came, and the backwoods village of Ontario to which he took her, that it never occurred to the bride she had changed her country. Thus a very simple happening, due to nothing but this backwoods innocence of hers, was fraught with comic if rather dangerous consequences to the couple within the first six months of their wedding.

The children of the village school were to give some little entertainment including the singing of a patriotic song, and the waving of a patriotic flag. Young Mrs Duan was asked to make the flag. She betook herself to the store, bought some red and white material and spent one whole day, as she used to say afterwards, 'sewing on all those durned little stars.' When the time came and 'Britannia rules the Waves' was backed up by the brandishing of unexpected Stars-and-Stripes there was an indignant uproar in the audience. The only person present bewildered as to the offence was the perpetrator herself of this supposed joke. Mrs Dunn had never seen any flag but the American; when they asked her to make one for this occasion it could not strike her they would mean any other. It was some time, however, before so guileless an explanation was credited by the folk of the place, and for a day or so Dunn's position at the mill was in jeopardy.

Dr Liston had made up his mind about Sandra at first sight. He allowed nothing after that but professional calls, excursions, and preoccupations to delay the course of the brief courtship which soon culminated in their engagement.

He was not then, nor ever had been, anything of a sentimentalist, no more than

Mrs Dunn, who hastened to proclaim the event since it not only disposed effectually of Ansell Carter but did away with the 'hanging around' of two or three other fellows whom she rightly looked upon as undesirables for Sandra, but to the persistence of one or another of which the girl was likely enough to yield just to escape the man she hated. She was such a child, and the sunny silent valley of Gopher Creek had taught her no more of worldly wisdom than of herself until the right man came. He came very suddenly, for Liston saw the way the wind was blowing, and put a stop to Carter at once. If the Doctor were the right man for Sandra's heart, he was the right man far more than the other for Sandra's mother's sharper sense. He could give her girl the sort of home 'Paw' would approve, at least as well as Carter, nor did he drink.

George Liston had to the full the power of filling life with the satisfactions of work. But he had only to face himself after that first encounter with his sweet Beggar Maid in the turnip field, (as he had not cared or willed to do, since, in emigrating, he had turned his back on the women of his own world at home), to admit that the passions of his age, driven back into the recesses of that strange reserve some men have even with themselves, heaped over by the occupations of a healthy, toilsome life, held him now at

their mercy. He was quite a type of those clean-minded Englishmen to whom anything but love is of primary importance until they come upon this unawares ; one of those men who care only for one woman, and who are capable of an insensibility amounting to rudeness with others. Things as they were might have sufficed for him, until he met Sandra ; then, a sudden vision of the roseate in life took all colour from the commonplace.

The quick perception, too, that she was harassed by this man Ansell Carter, if not even in some danger since his own appearance on the scene, decided Liston (as he took good care it should decide Sandra's mother) without any ado whatever.

He did not risk the chance of Carter seeing the big shy lovely girl again. There was a row between the two men ; the sort of row in which the baulked and common nature of the one helplessly betrayed itself, and which had brief and eminent satisfactions for the other. He went straight to Sandra after that and asked her to marry him.

She had been waist-deep in the wheat by the trail side, examining the long golden heads for 'smut,' when he came upon her, a trifle set and determined after the incident with Carter, and by no means certain of the girl. He meant she should care, anyhow ; but the whole thing had been a bit astonishing and Sandra had never said two words to him—two words of any likelihood—

He came through the rustling sea of wheat and held out both arms.

'Sandra,' he said, 'I've been anticipating a bit, and thrashed Carter. Give me the right to do it again if needs be.'

She stood quite still and looked at him, then a burning blush stained her neck and cheek. In a moment he had her in his arms, and was covering the tell-tale face with kisses. That the sweet fruit should fall at a touch—!

Somehow or other they retreated to a cairn heaped on the headlands when her father first ploughed the field and cleared it with a crow bar of its boulders and its share-breaking rocks. He had surprised the truth with the first glance at her face, and Sandra had no art to hide her love and confusion.

'Oh, . . . ' she owned, . . . 'since the first day you ever come here! But I never thought to have you loving me—'

'You never gave me a sign, I didn't know until this very moment that you wouldn't turn me down!'

'I was that skeered,' she murmured, 'and that silly.'

'Scared, Sandra darling? Scared of me?'

'Only that you would guess how I loved you—that you would know—'

It had shamed her violently in her own simple heart that all the repulsions she had felt for Ansell Carter should so translate

themselves for another man as they had done for Liston.

She hid her face against him, and amazed at an innocence which so betrayed her, the man soon had his own feeling in check. Sandra needed his chivalry.

It was well, perhaps, for both of them that even at this crisis his Hospital scheme could retain any relief in his mind. He grasped at it in the intervals of those first kisses, those first avowals than which life holds nothing more novel or more exquisite, in order to help her surmount the almost cruel intensity of her shyness. Sandra was inarticulate about this thing that had befallen the two of them, but she found something to say when he spoke of something else.

He sat down upon the cairn and a little above her, bent to get his arm about her waist. She scrambled up higher and closer, displacing the stones.

'We'll haul them to Finlay,' he said, 'for the foundations, eh? Four or five loads ought to do.'

She was the first one to hear it all, and she accepted it as she 'accepted' Liston himself, with an almost dog-like faith. He told her it might mean they must wait a bit to get married, but Sandra cared nothing for that. She was so glad 'to be quit of Ansell,' though nothing would have made her take even one of 'them others' after

Liston had come. 'I'd sooner have died,' she said.

'It was an awful risk anyway,' he told her reproachfully, 'you should never have thought of it. Couldn't you ever have told me, eh?'

Her face flamed and the tears stood in her eyes. There were kisses Carter had tried to take when he had been drunk once or twice, of which she was the sort of dumb honest girl who would have drowned herself in the river rather than complain, even to a woman. Least of all to her intrepid mother!

He passed a caressing hand over her hair, lifting her face and her lips again, gently, to his.

'If I'd known sooner I wouldn't have waited an hour, Sandra. But how was I to guess that you—cared for me?'

'Oh, I was *skeered* you'd know,' she murmured. 'I used to feel that silly when first you come here, and used to sit in the kitchen and talk to Maw. As if everything I did was wrong somehow. As if I couldn't even fill the kettle or get out at the door. It was just because I was that fond of you—'

'And you weren't shy like that of Fred or Charlie Wells and the others—?'

'Them boys!' she said, 'no, I never took no notice of them. I'd never have took Charlie after you come that day and asked

me the trail to Babcock's. Even to get quit of *him*—!

'Well — what's all the difference?' he insisted laughing. Then, as she found nothing to reply, 'You know,' he prompted, 'but you won't tell, eh? You sweet girl, Sandra! You mustn't be scared of anyone any more, and least of all of me!'

George Liston had become engaged to Sandra early in the fall, and a month or so later, in the winter, he formally proposed the idea of a Cottage Hospital for Finlay and submitted it to the discussion of a special meeting of the soi-disant Board of Trade.

This Board consisted, practically, of everyone in the embryo town except their wives and babies. Its deliberations, hitherto never very weighty, (except once, when old Warman had been buried in the middle of the 'government road' instead of within the supposed area of the sketchy cemetery), were held so irregularly that every meeting necessitated a special round-up of the members. It took the inside of half-an-hour to canvass all Finlay, yet a quorum could never be roped in under a couple of hours. To get a handful of men together all in one place and all at one time was as difficult as driving pigs. The matter scarcely, however, ended here. Once half-a-dozen over-alled or shirt-sleeved men were finally hunted into the little office at the lumber yard which served the purposes of the Board, it appeared

that no one had anything to say. They resigned themselves then to irrelevant chat, and chewing-gum, and the use of the cuspidor, in short to wasting time at a Board meeting as they had been wasting it elsewhere when the summons came.

On this occasion Dr Liston managed a muster of sixteen or so, and all the familiar faces were there, except that of Phil Croft, the section boss, one of the best men in the town. He was out on the line, of course, with the hand car, surveying the track as he surveyed it inch by inch every day in the year, from the roasting days of summer when the thermometer stood at 106° in the shade—if there was any shade—to the bitter winter drop of thirty below zero. Liston had already sounded him on the matter, and the staid-minded Agent, and knew they were at his back.

Presently it occurred to Rogers the auctioneer, Chairman of the Board of Trade and theoretically the most public-spirited man in the place, that there was business to be done, and that—apparently—it devolved upon him to mention the fact, since Dr Liston, satisfied with getting the meeting together, had relapsed into sphinx-like cogitations, and waited for his lead.

He got up upon his somewhat accustomed legs and mentioned it.

'On the last occasion of such a Meeting, (they remembered the minutes of it then, and

the Secretary turned them up as soon as he had decided which end of his account book contained them)—on the last occasion they had been met together to deliberate as to what measures had best be taken to preserve order in the town and safety in its one street on Saturday nights. This the gentlemen present would remember, was in consequence of Mr Carter having got considerably tight (not in his, Rogers', pool room he might remark, where nothing but the most innocuous soft drinks were for sale), and having smashed up his team and buggy, to say nothing of himself and the sidewalk, within full view of—of—of—well, of everybody! The town being as yet too small to admit of an application for a North-West trooper, the Board of Trade had decided—well—perhaps the Secretary could tell them what the Board of Trade *had* decided—it had escaped the President's memory just at the moment—they wouldn't be surprised at that—great press of work this last week—and, and, and, well in short, perhaps he had better get to the point and mention that the present meeting had been called to consider a proposal of their worthy Doctor's with regard to the building of a Hospital. Perhaps they had already heard something of it—?'

He glanced about inclusively swinging a little pencil case by its ring with the air of beating up and together the ideas of his

hearers so that any obligation of his to put the thing clearly might appear excused.

'—— as President of the Board of course, he could not but feel, himself, that a hospital would be an immense improvement to the town—and—and—in short, he had no doubt that they'd all think so to. Perhaps the Doc would now favour them?'

Liston had bestowed his legs away on a box somewhere in the background up to this point and delivered no single remark. Rogers had to be allowed to kick off. Appealed to, now, he appeared to make some effort to be as long-winded as the matter required. Speaking with quiet deliberation characteristic of him even more when something close to him was at stake, than when deciding with his cool firm fingers on the unconscious Carter's irreproachable pulse that he was not going to die 'just yet,' he outlined the idea of this hospital; laid it bare, as it were, on the table for Finlay's inspection. There was no glossing over of the responsibilities of such an undertaking, nor of the obligations it would entail. There was no mention of his own intention to shoulder the lion's share of the work or to find the bulk of the funds. He urged nothing and reserved nothing . . . only Sandra who had known him propose to her like this, might have guessed the fires beneath.

'There is one thing,' he said, 'which must be remembered. The whole undertaking

will entail a lot of work, and if we set our hands to it at all, it must be on the understanding that each man does his share. Somebody once said that if it had been left to a committee the Ark itself would never have been built. And another thing—we must be prepared for difficulties. I don't know why, but Church choirs, amateur theatrical societies, and hospital boards seem inevitably to get into worse messes and bitterer rows than any other associations. It is perhaps, because people lose sight of the thing they aim at, by the way. Even here in Finlay we have split ourselves up half-a-dozen times trying to run a rifle range, an athletic club or a rink. Don't let's have any of that over the hospital. It's going to be the very best thing that ever happened, not only for this place but for the whole of the West, if we manage to put it through—'

They agreed it would, certainly, be a fine thing for the town: one or two enquiries were made as to whether the Doctor proposed to let the contract for building or to have it done by day labour, locally.

'That,' he said, 'would be for the Board to decide, the Hospital board, should they elect one.'

He was not surprised that no question came up as to the need of the thing. Either this was recognised as he himself recognised it, or that aspect of the matter weighed less with these struggling little traders, equal

perhaps at the outset only to one, the immediately obvious, view of the proposal. It would undoubtedly mean a lot for the town.

The Secretary made some surreptitious calculations on a stray piece of paper during a discussion marked by no dissentient note, if by a certain failure to grasp any of the larger issues involved. The Doctor was sufficiently satisfied; only his tolerance for anything that might be construed as prudence withheld him from suggesting that the meeting be called to order and proceed to the election in any way that pleased it of a Hospital Committee.

At last Rogers intervened, highly pleased to voice general good will which so far committed him to no more onerous duty. He reminded the meeting of the necessity of some sort of a resolution. It was concocted, dictated to somebody to put, seconded and carried nem. con.

The next business, of course, was the nomination of candidates to form a Hospital Board and their acceptance of the nomination. Matters were indefinitely prolonged by the Secretary's conscientious notion that after putting together the scrappiest notes of the meeting, it was necessary for him to record all the proposings and secondings at this inconclusive stage. Things cheered up, though, over the voting, and became hilarious, and the scrutineers had hard work to keep secret any of their business. When the

elections were declared, and among others, Watt, the lumberman, for chairman (it had been hoped he would give a good cut on the lumber), Mackay, the Manager of the little rabbit hutch of a local Bank, for treasurer, and Dr Liston himself for what Rogers in a tour-de-force of official oratory described as 'secretarial—well—er—secretarial *Secretary*,' everybody was at a pinnacle of optimism, and in humour high as though this had been his idea thus acclaimed and embodied by the Board! There was a general movement towards the door, arrested by Rogers losing his head completely, and calling recklessly for a ten dollar whip round to inaugurate the Building Fund.

When Liston found himself in the street again, taking deep breaths of accomplishment, the sight of Sandra on the sidewalk opposite released a spring in him, too. He strode to greet her with the news.

'A hundred and forty dollars, Honey! And the Board of Trade is going to make our Board a present of the site.'

She flushed with the pleasure of it, for him, and caught her lip between her teeth.

'Good fer you——!'

Mrs Dunn ran out from the store behind, 'Land's sakes, George,' she cried, 'then, here's a chance for more! They say a special is coming through this afternoon, an excursion of fifty business men from Winnipeg—why not get after them? Say, Sandra,

you take a box—Hold 'em up right here, you'd double the money !'

It was funny the way the big, beautiful girl, who looked even bigger in her old coon coat, shrank like a child at the notion. 'I'd die, Maw,' she said, and meant it. She thrust her hands—fine nervous hands they were, and large for a woman,—deep into the side pockets of her coat and huddled more closely into it. Liston laughed and took her under his arm.

'You're right, Maw,' he promised that enterprising lady, 'Sandra'd fix that bunch of men right enough. And she's going to do it for the Hospital and me.'

She protested again, helplessly, aware that it was not in her to do this thing. The imperturbability of Liston who assured she would, and contented himself with that, robbed her of any power to formulate a refusal outright, an argument, or the idea of flight. . . .

When the sun was at its brightest, and all the tiny flags down at the dépôt were flapping their wildest in the keen prairie wind, on the wings of which came the news of the approach of the special, Liston joined the little group awaiting it on the platform. Sandra Dunn was with him, and never Russian princess bedecked with sables and the costliest of diamonds from St Petersburg, looked a rarer rose than she in a close cap of white rabbit skin tinged with almost opal-

escent blue and pink, and the diamonds of her frozen breath clinging to its edges and her rich dark hair. A few minutes later and the cars lined up alongside, a crowd of gentlemen swarmed out upon the platform, and Finlay rose to the occasion as one man. Their leader submitted to buttonholing by Rogers who offered him a box of baled Havanas in the name of the Board of Trade, and 'the freedom—while you're with us—of this city.' His party found itself being harangued in a manner at once delighted, patriotic and mercenary. The business men from the middle West had assuredly never expected so lively a demonstration! While all of them wore a broad smile they collectively looked much as a big boy looks when he tumbles inadvertently over a colony of flustered and excited ants. The special was scheduled to stop no longer than ten minutes at Finlay, so as soon as it dawned upon the Winnipeg party that this was a Hospital deputation out for dollars, they dived willingly enough into their pockets and demanded who was taking up the collection. Here then was Sandra's chance. Liston abandoned her to the nearest group, and the girl's struggle to muster sufficient bravado to hold out those hands of hers for the bills pressed into them, her confusion and her beauty, wrought the good temper of the crowd to something like enthusiasm.

Tears of shyness in her eyes fought with

the blushes of pleasure in her arresting face : the men agreed as they clambered back into the cars, amid cheers and the clamour of the engine bell, it was the prettiest stunt they had seen on the trip !

It certainly accounted for the jolly total—\$210—with which Mr Mackay opened the Hospital account at his Bank.

CHAPTER III

THE HAMLET

The building of the Hospital undoubtedly meant a great deal to Finlay.

Two years after the railway camp had left it, and rail-head was by that number of seasons nearer the Western coast, the embryo town consisted of no more than the original dépôt (station) and water tower, plus a store and a couple of shacks. Three or four years later an absolute rash of little wooden dwellings like upturned packing cases broke out with no more pronounced a *raison d'être* as to time or place than this, at that particular spot on the illimitable face of the rolling prairie. Already two or three fairly marked trails converged upon it; one of them crossed a culvert a mile to the north-east and finally joined the latest made stretch of 'government road.'

The place consisted of the inevitable 'Main Street' of the western rectangular plan, but as yet First Streets East and West were but sketchily indicated by the blacksmith's smithy on this side and the barber's and the butcher's and the little Bank on that.

A big square Hotel which displayed at night the only street lamp of which the hamlet could boast, stood at the corner facing the railway line, and glaring across it at the hump-shouldered elevator. Five or six little wooden cottages with a preference for white or red or green paint, more like seaside bungalows or glorified bathing machines than anything else, formed the residential quarter, and beyond them a squat little Church of brown-stained shingles, the school-house and a farm or two formed the northern fringe of the village. There were two general stores, rather ambitious structures with high false pediments to their façades sheathed in painted tin; a post office, a saddlery, a livery barn and feed stable, pool room, bakery, lumber yard and unsuccessful restaurant. The big machine shed around which there was always a litter of gaily painted new wheels, and waggon-boxes of the familiar Bain type, of immaculate new ploughs and rakes and mowers, boasted an upper storey which served as a sort of public hall whenever there was a dance, a concert, or a bit of speechifying to be done. The total length of Finlay's wooden side walks could not have amounted to more than a quarter of a mile, however unfathomable may have been the dust or mud of its deeply rutted ways. Once in a while there would be a removal, not of the contents of a store or house, but of the building itself, and the

presence of a gaping hole by the street like the ugly socket of an extracted tooth would reveal what had been somebody's notion of a cellar. The loss in one place would be compensated by the re-appearance of the house elsewhere on the hitherto open prairie ; this looked as though the town were growing.

Finlay may not have amounted to very much in itself, but it was the distributing centre of a splendid and fully settled-up homesteading district. Farmers came down from the north, a four or five days' journey in the ox-waggon, every six months or so for stores ; and beyond them the country was opened up for still another twenty miles by the government road piercing it as the crow flies. To the south it was the same. East and west on the railway line there were neighbour hamlets at intervals of seventeen miles. Endless, illimitable panoramas of rolling steppes, ranges of mild blue hills, tracts of bush land, and folds in the prairie amounting to deep gullies, in places three or four miles in winding length, gave a beauty to the country as diversified as its indescribable atmospheric effects. Everywhere, round ponds or even chains of lakes, formed by the melting of snow where it had drifted deepest round the belts of willow scrub, and now blue in the spring green of the land as the May heavens above, attracted the chattering wild fowl winging their way north again,

and resounded with the shrilling of a million frogs. Notwithstanding that the country was fully settled-up immense tracts of it could be traversed where the namelessness, isolation and peace of that first chapter in Genesis in the dawn seemed still to reign. From the geologic day, old as creation records, when God divided the dry land from the waters and saw that it was good, to the coming of the railroad and the settlers, the prairies had been the theatre of no history save that of the buffalo and of the Red Man his hunter. Only now, a huddle here and there of low sod-roofed farm buildings, a trail, a rare corner stake, or a wide-flung tract of ploughing, added the second word to the story of a new fair world. Finlay itself, that bald little prairie village like a handful of Lilliputian toys spilt in the midst of nowhere, was nothing more or less than the initial letter of an early chapter. A very plain initial letter, at best, with no borderings or flourishes. How plain became apparent enough when it came to choosing a site for the Hospital. Beyond this line or that, this spot or the other, the town survey did not extend and lots were not spaced for sale.

Mr Rogers was vastly important with a blue print from the Lands office of the Railway Company on the evening in May when Dr Liston carried his Hospital Board to the top of the rise where he was determined to build. Everything was just right

there, drainage and aspect, altitude and distance. The hamlet was just far enough away in case funds should run to an isolation wing. . . . An immense discussion as inept over the plan of the townsite, as inexpert on these considerations, rendered fragmentary moreover by the disputants separating constantly and inadvertently to step it out, measure, and hunt for landmarks on their own accounts, was only brought to a conclusion at last by the discovery that six feet or so would make all the difference between a site within or without the line of civic survey.

Having carried his point in the main, the Doctor yielded the odds without ado. He strolled over the ground with the rest, his pipe hanging loosely between his teeth, liking all this evidence of their interest, though it rather bored him. He was a man whose purposes were based on anything but impulse; who betrayed as little impatience with the fussy obviousness of others' methods of attainment, as he betrayed of the thoughtful processes of his own. He prised out a stone or two while Rogers and Mackay and Watt settled disputes of their own, then straightened himself up against the glow in the west watching a buggy coming up the slope and surveying the village behind, whose rawness and newness not even the light of a sweet spring evening could invest with a thought of poetry. Appropriately

enough at such a moment Mr Rogers discovered an immense objection and explained it.

'This,' he said, 'will presently be the heart of the business quarter—we'll have the street cars up and down here, eh Doctor? How'd that suit the patients? Not much, I'm thinking?'

Liston took his pipe from his teeth and looked at it to hide a smile. He turned a leisurely head.

'By that time if we sell we shall well afford to shift,' he remarked. 'What about the investment in real estate?'

'You're right there! You bet yer!' Rogers exploded, delighted with such a declaration of faith, 'build half-a-dozen Hospitals then, eh?'

'Sure,' said Liston, 'why not.'

A new voice broke in.

'Tell me, Doctor—do I understand this is to be a *maternity* Hospital, or one where all sorts of cases will be taken? My wife and I are so *extremely* interested—'

It was Mr Aldersey, the Incumbent of three parishes as big as an English diocese, architect and builder of Finlay's wooden cathedral.

Liston was pleased to see him back, newly ordained, from the College at Saskatoon. The developments on the hill would be news to him indeed after six months' absence! The two men shook hands cordially and Mrs Aldersey in the buggy declared there

was room for the Doctor if he would jump up.

'Do tell me all about it,' she begged with a pretty imitation of her young husband's earnestness, 'Ned and I are *so* anxious to do what we can to help.'

'If ladies are included in the Board you could not do better than nominate my wife for election,' Mr Aldersey laughed, teasing her, but half in earnest, 'she would be invaluable I'm sure. I may say I owe it entirely to her that I am not too insolvent at the present moment to offer you our small—very small—contribution to the fund which I understand has been opened for this Hospital?'

His slightly pedantic enunciation, like Liston's own effort after starched shirt cuffs, was but the tradition of a standard. Nothing could take from the spirit of the gift. Mr Aldersey's five dollars was perhaps the nearest to a sacrifice Liston's enterprise had yet received.

'I think, dear,' his wife said, 'you had better leave me out of the question—'

'Not so! Dr Liston would be the last to think so! My wife, Doctor, is a remarkable business woman, even if I have had occasion sometimes to disparage her cakes. We went to Saskatoon six months ago—as you know, for me to complete my course of studies before ordination—and, as you do *not* know, I trust, without a cent. Unable to rent a

house, we borrowed \$100 from the Bank to build one, and my wife nailed on the roof. I need not go into that—she did, incidentally, but, anyway, the roof was fixed at last. We sold that house on the eve of our departure for exactly one hundred and ten dollars. I repaid the loan at the Bank with interest, and you are now in possession of the balance.'

Glancing from one to the other as he spoke, the young man's pride in his wife would have been obvious to a cow.

Liston thanked them for the money. 'I think,' he said looking up into a face which if remarkable in no way for beauty, was alive with sensibility and goodness, 'we shan't be able to do without you on our Board, Mrs Aldersey.'

This raised the alternative question of a 'Woman's Auxiliary,' on which, of course, she was an expert. Ethel Aldersey's complexion had long since been sacrificed to the open air life she led always driving about the prairie with her husband; her hair was never known to be tidy, and she dressed badly. There was, however, a force about her born directly of a conscientious discharge amid every circumstance of prairie novelty and drawback, of the duties devolving on a clergyman's wife. If the Doctor ever wondered whether the rôle was quite native to her, it was only to admire her the more. She hated sewing, and every woman in the village seemed to know she couldn't yet cook.

'But you haven't told us anything yet of the scheme,' the young clergyman pursued, '—er—may I ask is this a public enterprise, or a private venture of your own?'

An inscrutable expression flitted over the Doctor's face. The question was inevitable sooner or later; it was like Aldersey's honesty to have asked it outright. He and Ethel Aldersey alone, perhaps, were possessed of insight enough, training enough—spiritual capacity enough, if it came to that—to credit as honest a reply.

'The only man who stands to lose by this Hospital, at least for a bit,' he replied, 'is myself. It is no "venture" of mine in the sense you might suppose.'

They looked puzzled.

'Mileage fees have generally been heavy enough to make it up to me, you know,' Liston said; 'when the patient has lived too far off to afford more than one visit during an illness. I shall lose my mileage fees but pay my patients as many visits, here in hospital, as they may need.'

He outlined the insurance plan which, it was to be hoped, would bring the poorest or the unluckiest of the settlers within reach of the benefits of his scheme, and of the institution. 'So much for maintenance,' he concluded, 'the building funds must be begged.'

Mr Aldersey looked concerned.

'A big undertaking, Doctor, I'm afraid.'

Of course we can institute Hospital Sunday. You might give me the points for my sermon.'

His wife went back to another thought.

'When you say you will be a loser over it, I suppose you don't mean you take no fees at all, Doctor Liston?'

'Oh, certainly not,' he smiled. 'I must live, Mrs Aldersey. My fees will have to be taken the same as before—but, of course, I can afford to give much better value in attention for the money, and can pay more visits at a lower cost and strike out the mileage part of the business altogether.'

He thought it best to be explicit.

'It's the meantime,' he said, 'which will squeeze me a bit. I shall give up my house for a while and live at Mrs Maloney's.'

'But we heard you were going to be married,' they exclaimed, 'to Sandra Dunn?'

'So I am,' Liston returned, 'but it won't be quite so soon as we hoped, that's all. That's part of what I mean when I say I stand to lose—at first.'

There was something bigger here than Edward Aldersey might remonstrate with, and the Doctor's manner asked for no comment. The two young people felt they were in the presence of something quixotic or great, and Finlay, the material-minded little place, they knew was a poor stage for either.

They drove on, in a minute or so, to greet the rest of the Board, and come down to

the more familiar level of its ambitions. Aldersey agreed this was a splendid site,—it would certainly mean a boom for the town.

The Alderseys were a charming couple ; she, representative in the newer West of the refined womanhood of the middle-class England, which has not yet begun to emigrate, and he of a Church which had conceived the idea of one gentleman, at least, in every parish. It was curious that nationality accounted for nothing of the liking existing between them and the Doctor. Liston had no clannish instincts, and no class preferences.

His religion was that defined by St James, and his firmest belief that by man's conduct to man would be the judgment of his standing with God. Carlyle's dictum. 'Blessed is he who has found his work ; let him ask no other blessedness,' summed up for the prairie doctor the spiritual content of his life and of this scheme of his, although, to be sure, Sandra seemed 'another blessedness,' and he had not been slow to ask for her.

There was little ready money in the district, and Liston had made arrangements to withdraw the whole of his small capital on which he had hitherto depended for the nest egg of his precarious income, to meet the estimates when these should be prepared, for the Hospital.

Not a man in Finlay knew where to turn

except to the originator of the scheme for all its initial expenses, although it escaped them how he raised the money. His giving up his house and removal to Mrs Maloney's was sufficiently explained, as Liston took care it should be, by his having less and less spare time to look after his own creature comforts and do his cooking.

One of the first consequences of the enterprise was the indefinite postponement of the wedding.

Mrs Dunn at Gopher Creek was disappointed when Liston owned he did not quite know whether he and Sandra could be married that year, and inclined to be a little indignant when he took this step. Before that they had discussed a drug store and a stationery business combined, a feasible proposition enough when he should have a wife to look after them in his absences. He gave her no adequate explanation, however, since that of preoccupation with the Hospital might seem to slight Sandra, and mere finances remained his own affair. To the girl herself, an incident of his practice in the winter fully accounted for any sacrifice of time or money—she guessed something of the latter—George might make for the Hospital. She was as far from being jealous of his work as other prairie girls of the wheat which absorbed as much of the men's time and devotion.

Their neighbour Mrs Babcock had given

birth to her first baby one night in January when the thermometer registered forty degrees below zero. Babcock was away at a farmers' meeting and a blizzard delayed his return. She lay for six hours after the birth of the child before anyone found her without a stick left in the heater, or anything to eat or drink at hand. Her husband only got home late in the morning having left the bob sleighs on the trail and abandoned himself to the guidance of his ox, by holding on to its tail. His wife was half-dead, and he half-frozen with fright, exhaustion and exposure, when he got down with his story to Mrs Dunn. In a twinkling Sandra had been despatched in the cutter for George, and that good creature her mother was making the best of her way on foot to the sick woman. Sandra's hands and arms were frozen to the elbow, and the mare's nostrils were red with blood from the lungs, when she reached the hamlet, but she would no more hear of Liston delaying to help her then, than, later, she dreamed of pressing him about the wedding. There were occasions when Sandra's refusals could not be over-ridden.

Mrs Maloney looked after her that day, and it was she who told Liston he should get the old lady to take him in there when he gave up his house. She knew the warm-hearted Irishwoman would scout the notion of terms.

'Would you have me, Mrs Maloney?' he

asked, 'I would rather come to you than the hotel.'

'Sure and I will not!' very decidedly on the doorstep.

For the moment he was misled.

'Sure an' it's not good enough fer yer,' she explained. 'It's not good enough, I'm tellin' yer!'

She retreated into the kitchen, clean and orderly as the most fastidious could desire, and stood there in the middle of the floor as unmistakeable an Irishwoman as ever called the Saints to witness, declaring the place was not good enough for the likes of him.

'——But sure! if so be as ye're maning what ye say,' she conceded, delighted with his protestations, 'come right in. There's no body more plazed to put ye up!'

Mrs Maloney was an old timer, not in Finlay, whither she had come to live after her husband's death, and where her son Tom had now made a model little home for her, but in the district. Maloney had been with the first railroad surveyors through that part of the country, and had filed on a quarter section as soon as it was thrown open for homesteading. None knew what pioneering meant better than his wife. Tom sold the farm as soon as he got the post of tank man on the section, and refused to let his mother do another stroke of work outside the house. She now constituted the sole representative of a leisured class in Finlay, and had nothing

to do between meal times but 'walk the flure', i.e. tramp about her little kitchen, and hold wordy altercations with a neighbour's self-willed, thieving cat. Tom never guessed how his mother hankered after the farmyard and the cows, how she made a little walk of a morning an excuse for 'getting after' some of them with the Agent's daughter Sally. The only respite from care and labour for which the old lady was really grateful she owed to George Liston. Hitherto, Mrs Maloney had been, willy nilly, the amateur nurse for the whole country side, always in demand if it were anyway possible to get her in childbirth and in sickness. But as time went on she tired of it, lost confidence, and shrank more and more from the grave responsibilities she was no more fitted to take upon herself, than simple good heartedness could make her. No one had hailed the advent of a doctor more heartily than she, and no one now realised—even better than Liston himself—how greatly this Hospital of his was needed. He used to think, sitting by her stove of an evening waiting for Tom and the meal, how a tithe of the stories the old lady could tell would serve to vindicate such a contention should any arise. The case of Mrs Babcock last winter was anything but unique in his own experience. Then there had been poor Mainwaring too, who went completely off his head not because of the injury to his leg

which kept him so long a prisoner in the shack, but because of the state of dirt and neglect he fell into alone and untended.

Mrs Maloney was a Catholic, whose spectacles when mislaid could always be found bookmarking, in the well-thumbed little prayerbook that seemed to lie all over the place. She had been in high religious feather when Mass was celebrated for the first time in Finlay, and the priest, a young French Oblate, drove the seventeen miles from his little Mission at Mooseberry, and met the Catholics of the district in the Schoolhouse. His altar consisted of the teacher's desk on the dais wheeled round with its back to the wall and spread with an altar cloth. Above it hung the clock and a fly-blown calendar: on either side extended long wall space blackboards scribbled over still with last week's sums, and lessons in elementary grammar. It had been strange that at such a season—it had been at harvest time last year—when every man was toiling as men only toil in pioneering lands, when every woman was working with the strength of two to provide against the long long winter, that the message for them all should have been to 'consider the lilies of the field, they labour not . . . the birds of the air sow not, neither do they reap nor gather into barns. . . . ' In a few phrases of broken English the young Canadian in his shabby vestments, standing beside the poorest altar

in all Christendom, drew out the meaning of the paradox. It stilled something of the keen anxiety of the harvest-time, infused something of real rest into the Sunday of those toil-worn hard-handed prairie wives and mothers. The little crowd melted away afterwards on foot for the village, in buggies and democrats to the farms. Père Joinville went over to the Alderseys for a meal and complimented Ethel on her coffee!

CHAPTER IV

A PICNIC

ALMOST a year went by before Finlay Hospital stood, an accomplished if still unfinished fact, upon the rise to the west of the hamlet.

The short summer ran its fervid crowded course, and the freeze-up of the succeeding winter was at hand before operations actually began with the cellar-digging in November.

There had been an immense amount of work to be got through first!

Carefully as Dr Liston had thought out the thing in his own mind and traced the steps of it, when the Committee actually got down to business it was no use attempting to deal with more than lay immediately ahead, or to tackle more than one at a time of the series of practical problems into which the undertaking bade fair to resolve itself.

They were a Committee of amateurs, from Rogers the Chairman, a man whose optimism emanated largely from the way his wife kept his home, and whose consequent geniality and unvarying hospitality might have known

no bounds but for the state of business in the Pool Room, to the rather gentlemanly Burns who distinctly understood literature, and to Dillon the hardware storekeeper upon whose initiative indeed the Finlay Board of Trade had been started. But new to their own businesses, they were hopelessly new to this. Ineptitude and inexperience may not excuse men in the West, however, from tasks and responsibilities in a new land such as might never devolve upon their shoulders elsewhere or overshadow their modest lots in life at home. Often Liston felt himself as much at a loss as anyone. The purchase of the site, the elaboration of experimental plans and specifications, the discussion of alternative building schemes, drainage and lighting problems, and the sinking of the well, to say nothing of the financial and publicity campaign, would have provided a full enough programme for a well-trained Committee used to the conduct of public business, with advisers to hand on technical matters, and some expert knowledge to command. As it was, every initiative and most of the resolutions devolved on the Doctor. Equipped for the task no better than the rest of them, save for indomitable purpose, George Liston worried along step by step, dragging the Committee after him, halting for it, bearing with it (where anything professional was concerned) less, indeed, for the sake of the moral

support it could have given him, than out of his own innate regard for a constitutional way of doing things. A thousand details, in the way of exact minute taking, copies of correspondence, etc., went by the board as neither Liston nor anyone else had time enough to do nothing but secretarial work, but so far there was no one to catch up the Committee over that. Problems of freight or material, of labour or of technical application as puzzling for the Doctor to solve as for anyone, often floored the 'emergency meeting' called to consider it, and Liston himself would swing away down the sidewalk to attend to other importunities in the middle of a discussion fast becoming irrelevant, or focussing down to the usual resolution—'That we appoint Dr. Liston a Committee of one, to enquire into the matter and report to us upon it.' Seldom impatient, he was often worried. . . .

He had rented half of the unsuccessful restaurant as a temporary office, and here, on the step, his patients congregated, waiting for him. One of them wanted a tooth drawn; another had been out 'duck' shooting (before chicken season began) and had received a friend's charge of gun shot in his head; a third required stitches in his nose after pitching from a rig on to his face. The fourth, a lanky overgrown boy, was really ill, but presented a problem not so much in clinics, as in hygiene and in tact. His

skin, scaly with neglect and dirt, had ceased, in medical phraseology, 'to function,' and the prescription needed was nothing less than a course of Turkish baths. Liston admired Timmy as he admired Gould—for a hard and thorough worker, and an expert in his line. Timmy was an expert on the plough. Month in and month out he followed the teams over infinite stretches of 'breaking' or summer fallow, ploughing or drag-harrowing the land, burnt with the sun, drenched with sweat, blackened as a sweep from the coffee-coloured sods trampled into clouds of dust by the sixteen heavy hoofs in front, and dried rough and hard again by the boisterous prairie wind. Day after day all through the strenuous prairie summer Timmy tumbled out before dawn to feed the horses, and rolled into his bunk again at night only after having bestowed more care upon them than he had time or thought of for himself. He worked for a bachelor up north, and the two of them boxed up together cheel by jowl in a little cabin no bigger than a railway car, were chums of the soil, and rivals in the working of it. The only bother they gave themselves on the score of water was to haul enough of it for the horses, and a small tin bowl-full perhaps for a splashing of head and face on Sundays. Dr Liston gave the boy a bottle of what Timmy called 'dope,' and told him to come along to the picnic up at Louise Lake on the morrow :

there would be sports—and boating and swimming. He registered a resolution that whatever Timmy's boating might be like it should certainly eventuate in swimming, unless he, Liston, had forgotten his brass bound pranks, in these dusty prairie cares.

He set out himself next morning with 'old man' Jordan, who had come into town with the waggon overnight, to freight up a load of oranges, bananas, to the picnic ground next day. They were late owing to a three-cornered row between storekeeper, station agent and Jordan, over a refrigerator specially ordered and promised for the occasion which had failed to turn up, and it was nine o'clock before the waggon pulled out on the long northward trail.

The Doctor made rather a point of getting to as many local picnics, sports days, auction sales and what not, as he could, in order to arouse interest everywhere in the Hospital and arrive at some estimate of what the people could or would do throughout the district, towards its support. It was the only way of killing more birds than one with one stone. The picnic was a more favourable opportunity than another, as it embodied all the social ambitions of people so widely scattered, that a meeting of any sort was for them at once an undertaking and something of an occasion. It was always the same sort of a 'pow-wow,'

beginning somewhere in the forenoon by the gradual assembly at some chosen spot, of every description of prairie rig, buckboard democrat, waggon and buggy, whose occupants climbed out laden with baskets and parcels, looked round wondering how long it would be before 'folks' began to arrive, and began their share of the general preparations for the spread of cakes and jellies and cold meat pies, which always formed the *pièce-de-résistance* of the day. Liston might have felt he was losing time, perhaps, over this sort of thing, only that it resulted every now and again in an unforeseen response. Here a bunch of young fellows living close to the 'bush' promised the tamarack posts for fencing, there the women volunteered to get up a 'box-social' in aid of the building fund, and on one occasion Hunter, a professional well digger, came forward and undertook to sink the sixty foot well for the Hospital, cribbing it from top to bottom, for no charge beyond the expense of the teams.

Old Man Jordan was confident 'the boys' up at Louise Lake, would get up some sort of a bee and put in a day's work or so on the place, later in the year. Liston sucked his pipe the greater part of the way, preoccupied and monosyllabic, wondering if by any chance, Sandra and Maggie and Bob would be there. Mrs Dunn was good fun at a picnic, and worked harder to make the

utmost of such a holiday, than she did even on wash or baking days at home.

The trail to the Lake, twenty-three miles north of Finlay, ran through really beautiful country after the first hour's stretch of prairie sameness. It dipped then, and led down a long sloping hill to a smiling expanse of flat meadow land, remote and nameless, threaded by a river whose fantastic course doubled back upon itself half a dozen times in a mile, and—from the opposite height—drew a line of silver arabesque through the valley. The road wound upward again on the further side round the steep shoulder of a coulée, profound as a ravine, whose tree tops scarcely reached the level of the cutting. The heavy timber had been taken out by the first homesteaders in the neighbourhood, but the burnt and blackened stumps showing through the lighter growth of balsam and poplar, revealed something of the history of prairie woodland before the era of the settler, the railroad and the fires. On went the road again after that for hour after hour, straight as a crow's flight for the pole, belts and patches of 'scrub' broadly pierced to let it through marking it athwart the middle distances, and, when the country rose, stretching to the far horizon. Again it dipped, through dense tangles of willow, bramble and flaunting fire-weed to some lovely sheet of water, here darkening and widening to a lake, over whose surface some lonely little swimming thing left a broad

trembling arrow, and there shelving to a shallow pond where serried ranks of green encroaching sedges tossed and rippled like waves before the wind. Once more the gentle features of the down-land monopolised the view, gold where the blue heavens poured floods of sunshine over acres upon acres of ripening wheat, cinnamon and sand colour where the fierce August suns had burnt the prairie grass to death. Dragonflies like burnished jewels hung poised by the trailside in the quivering air, or shot across it iridescent as the gleam of fire on fine drawn strand of wire or silk.

By the time Jordan and the Doctor reached the picnic ground and were busy unloading pop and stuff beside the bough-roofed booth for soft drinks knocked up for the occasion, quite a good sprinkling of folk had already arrived.

There were the Alderseys of course,—this was a 'Church' picnic—officially pleasant as ever amid a sweet and sticky welter, and the piles of cups and saucers of the stall, over which they helped to preside since its proceeds were destined for the organ fund. There was 'old man' Madder with Mrs Madder on the front seat of a democrat, with Miss Alcock the school-teacher behind, a laughing romp of a girl with rebellious red-gold hair and a sunburnt face to match, destined to remain at Louise Lake school, the short time it might take her 'best boy' (a ship-

board acquaintance of last May), to get a footing in British Columbia and claim her. In the meantime she boarded with the Madders, and vied in a most unladylike manner with the farmer's four strapping lads in every outside job which might excuse her from any woman's work in the house. Then there was Mrs Broff a tall, raw-boned, Icelandic woman, with immense braids of hair from whose beauty even the hideous old motor cap she wore might not detract. Broff drove a fast fierce plug in a buckboard and invariably had the fight of a broncho-buster to get him unhitched and tied up quietly among the other horses under the trees. These people were encumbered with two fat and healthy children, whose teuton stoicism under every circumstance of holiday misadventure was only equalled by the primitive maternal solicitude. When tumbles, scratches or cuts beset—the mishap was generally a kick from a horse for the boy, or a scald from boiling water,—she suckled the child of two, or choked young hopeful with candy. The Amundsens were there, a blue-eyed, fair-haired tribe from Sweden, and the German Sachs, whose wife wore a big American sunbonnet with the grace of native costume. Mrs Barr the merriest, cheeriest body within a radius of twenty miles, who talked so like a blue streak that the wonder was her good humoured husband ever got enough words in edgeways to propose to her, had at once made herself the

centre of one of those groups of people who always feel at a loose end before things get well under way. Everyone was laughing round her. And the crowd grew from minute to minute as more vehicles joined the camping ground, and the bachelors of the picnic, the young men and boys, drifted off to a place of their own and started a game of rounders. Little Mrs Fane was there in a pretty white dress. Her dazzling white and red complexion and raven hair, made a wonderful contrast to the soft sandy colouring of her bosom friend Louisa Green; and the touch of real refinement about Louisa accounted even more than her rumoured Barnardo extraction for the aloofness of the Roaches, a dreadful Brixton family whose ambition was to 'lead society' in the township.

There was the inevitable group of farmer politicians who got together and fell headlong into waters rather deep for them, under the provocation of Jerry, the 'edjikator' socialist, and of men like Arkwright and Loundsbury, thoughtful fellows in their way, read-up rather than well-read in certain subjects, who were at one over the iniquity of 'surplus values,' 'melon-cutting' and the like, however little tolerance they had for other tendencies and aspects of each other's opinions. They were dreadfully ponderous for a picnic, but as they formed a caucus of their own, smoking, and grouped about the

standing waggon, they had as much right to enjoy themselves in being earnest and indignant, as had others at the cocoanut-shy or running races. Liston joined them presently, meditatively observant, and the talk veered round to some recent legislation clearing away the old 'Local Improvement Districts' for Rural Municipalities with greater powers and likely financial autonomies. Somebody produced a copy of the Act, and the Doctor studied the clauses in it relative to grants for local Hospitals, and municipal responsibility in case of infectious disease or epidemic. He put quite a lot of suggestive information in his pipe, and smoked it.

When he caught sight of Sandra, George drifted from the group unmissed.

Sandra came to picnics because there were always so many babies to be minded. It meant leaving the piglets for a whole long day, but babies were even better than piglets. She had one in her arms now, a good solemn baby, and two other distressful children gradually weakening in animosity to each other under her soothing, clung to her skirt. The Doctor was saddled with the trio for as long as he lay on the grass by Sandra, and worse than that, for Bob came and sat astride of him and led a rabble of prairie urchins to pound him for the where-withal to buy candy and sherbet at the booth. Sandra had all her work cut out to



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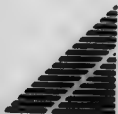
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resist the importunities of Peggy Alcock and two or three kindred spirits, who tried to drag her into the sports, and to taunt Liston that neither could he prevail in persuading her. Sandra wasn't going to show her legs up to the knees running races before all 'them men,' not she! Colour flooded her face as she gave them the reason and her eyes were a little resentful, like a curt shy boy's. She was, indeed, less like a woman than one of those sweet-natured lads who lack in no essential of character for all their innate bashfulness and gentler bearing. She might have been a trifle wanting in grace from the point of view of a mere femininity which had little to do with her, but any suspicion of immaturity about her was belied by the sight of Sandra within a mile of a baby. George was content enough that she should nurse this particular specimen all the afternoon if she liked, provided he drove her home in the evening. It wouldn't matter squashing Maggie, and Bob could hang on behind—or better still, they could drive with the Babcocks?

She agreed.

'Sure!' she smiled, simply, and again a little colour betrayed more than her speech.

Had George noticed that Ansell Carter had come to the picnic? There he was, over with them Johnsons.

The Doctor turned on a lazy elbow,

and eyed the group she indicated. A girl he knew well enough had the man in tow.

'He won't bother you, Sandra. Nancy Johnson will take care of that.'

The girl with an eye to the main chance and who hates to have it elude her is to be found even on the prairie where men advertise for wives. But this one, who would stick at little, (the antithesis of Sandra Dunn), had no interest for Carter perhaps on that very account. Few men who are just men, and not merely animals, are without discrimination of this sort. It did Ansell credit, in its way, that he could penetrate Nancy unttempted.

'He won't bother me,' Sandra knew. 'When they come by here just now she took good care he shouldn't pass much more than the time of day with me. But what's he come for, anyway? He don't care for her, and he didn't used to care for picnics either. He was that set in putting in all the time on the land.'

Liston laughed and rolled over on his stomach once more.

'It won't do him any harm, Sandra, and we shouldn't mind dancing at his wedding, should we? At that rate he might dance at ours.'

'Oh, he won't forget that quick,' she doubted. 'I can't make it out quite how he hasn't got his own back on you somehow,

before this. That's what makes me wonder what he's come for to-day.'

'Carter's a coward, Sandra. There's nothing he could do to me.'

It seemed like it anyhow. The man had not crossed Liston's path, or Sandra's either, for that matter, since the day he had been worsted at the doctor's hands.

'He'd never have molested you as he did, if there'd been anyone about; your father, dear, or Fred—'

'Oh, Fred!' she said. 'George, have you heard what's become of him? He's going to be married after all.'

She went off into a fit of unaccustomed laughter, and wiped her eyes before she could tell him the story. He sat up and put an arm about her and shook her at last into telling him the tale.

'Why,' she said, 'it was so long ago he'd almost forgot it himself. One time down home they was making cheeses and Fred said he'd written a love letter and put it in a little bottle, and the bottle in a cheese. The cheeses went away to England, and at last the one with the bottle in it got eaten I suppose, and a girl found his letter. And she went and wrote to him and sent her photograph, and she's coming out to Canada to marry him! Oh, George—' and Sandra, broke down again, 'funny part of it is he don't want her. He only did it for a game; and now she's coming and he can't send her

back! Maw laughed fit to kill herself when we heard.'

The man laughed down into her face.

'Say! he won't make a bad husband if he's too chivalrous to get out of it now. I think she's rather lucky, on the whole.'

'My land!' said Sandra wiping her eyes afresh, 'he used to tell us it would be a lucky girl that got him—he did indeed.'

'Well, so it would. Fred was a real good sort. I was jealous of Fred like anything.'

'—Now don't you!' she remonstrated, turning her head away, 'before all the folk! You had no call to be jealous, George.'

He got a kiss in, nevertheless, and more than one.

'Sandra,' he said, 'what a stick you are! I *shan't* hurt the baby!'

But no one knew better than he the real depth of Sandra's passion.

That she never used any endearments to the man who loved her, other than those in general use at home, and accepted the fact of love between them much as she accepted anything else, was because, utterly untrained in self-expression, Sandra was shy as a child and had nothing to say on the subject. One or two buggy drives they had had together, stood out in Liston's memory as the only bits of love-making he had really achieved. She had laid her face against his shoulder, inarticulate, and turned it down into his coat, close held by an

encircling arm, much as an ostrich hides its head in the sand. All the world had been blotted out for Sandra then, and when he turned her mouth up to his in the blue prairie moonlight, his kiss had drawn her soul through her lips. An unprincipled man, or merely one of the commoner clay, could have taken every advantage of a girl like this, and of a love such as Sandra's, absolute and primitive, protected by no reserve of convention or of worldly wisdom, but Liston was the type of man for whom a woman's innocence or a woman's indiscretion is a sacred thing. Mrs Dunn knew that right enough when she 'fired' Sandra's less desirable suitors, though she expressed it with the homely conviction that he was 'white, all through.'

A nucleus of conspirators, wearied of the sports, bore down upon Liston, Sandra and the children who had returned and were swarming over him again.

'Baseball or bust!' they declared, 'come on, Doc, we've mowed the field,'

Nothing loath, George swept the urchins off, and got up. 'Good for you fellers,' he remarked, 'afterwards you can round up the picnic and I'll get in my say. The game will draw the bunch pretty well together.' He threw his coat beside Sandra and told her the Alderseys would credit him for her tea. She could treat the kids all round.

Dr Liston was a good if unstudied speaker, simply because pose, or effort after effect of any sort was as alien to his thoughts, as his subject was the familiar substance of them. Flushed and tumbled after a game that had looked like hard work for over an hour, he had everyone 'aroused' by now, and went directly to the point of what he proposed to say, without one unnecessary word of introduction or history. The latter might well be taken for granted by any prairie folk. It struck him however, even as he spoke, how concrete the Hospital scheme had become, and how modified by the thousand and one considerations consequent upon putting the first steps of it to the test, since he broached it originally to Gould last winter, and to the Committee, later. There might be no such thing as final shape to this undertaking until all the experiments it bade fair to mean in organisation, finance and management, had worked themselves out to some conclusion. For the moment his concern was to make clear the distinction between the building fund and the proposals with regard to maintenance, and to arrive at an estimate not of what the people thought of the Hospital—for they all agreed it was 'a good thing'—but of what they might be likely to do to support it.

'So far as I can judge,' he said, 'the Hospital will cost about \$3,000 a year to run, or perhaps no more than \$200 a month,

if we limit the number of beds to ten and the staff to two nurses. This means that we ought to get three hundred men to come down with ten dollars a-piece every year. If we could, those ten dollar subscriptions might represent a sort of Sick Insurance policy, and entitle the subscribers of them to free Hospital treatment for any length of time throughout the year of subscription. But if we can't, the thing will have to be run on a system of daily charges ever so much more expensive for the patients. With three hundred ten dollars subscribers, a man or woman could lie up in Hospital as long as it might be necessary—six weeks if you like—for no more than those ten dollars; but without three hundred guarantors for this amount of income the patients would have to be charged by the day, a dollar or couple of dollars as the case might be. In three weeks of illness a man might pay, at that rate, more than two or four years Sick Insurance. I don't gain at mileage fees. For the cost of a doctor's visit out as far as this you have a two years' policy for the Hospital! It's well worth thinking over because as you know, and as I know, there isn't much alternative before any of you now in illness between stopping at home and chancing things, or taking a long railway trip to Battleford or Edmonton where the fees in a month might bust you.'

He paused searching the ring of rather

inscrutable faces for signs of intelligence or approbation. Talk about dollars could always command attention, but its immediate consequence, in this case, was an element of mistrust. Not a man there but wondered what Liston himself was 'out for'; not one but would have bet his bottom dollar the Doctor was on the make.

If Mr Aldersey perceived this, the diversion he made was in excellent taste.

'I think,' he ventured glancing round half questioningly, half apologetically, 'I think there can be little question in the minds of any of us as to the excellence and economy of this ten dollar plan, but it seems to me—if I may say so—that ten dollars is rather a lot to pay, and that you will have considerable difficulty in finding three hundred of us in any position to do so. One here and there, of course—'

A murmur of assent, and Liston, quick to detect whatever feeling might suggest adaptations in his search for the feasible, watched the effect of his reply.

'Ten dollars is a lot to pay down all at once, I admit, but to fix a lower sum would undersell every Insurance policy in the country. The ten dollars could be paid in quarterly or half-yearly instalments, or a promissory note could be taken for them, payable after harvest. It works out at less than a dollar a month—it might be paid that way.'

'Too much trouble to collect,' amended a voice.

Mr Aldersey left the point to its fate, and an old bearded man who leant heavily on a crutch and followed the discussion with shrewd, thoughtful eyes asked Liston how many persons the insurance would cover if held by the head of a family.

'The wife too, I should hope,' said the Doctor, 'but there would be a lower rate for children below earning age.'

Some dissentients found a spokesman to remark this seemed hardly fair to bachelors, and how about a man with a mother, for instance, dependent on him?

'The ten dollars would probably include any one other individual dependent on an unmarried man,' Liston replied, 'but points like that can all be settled once we find out if we're going to get our three hundred. How many of you here think you could afford ten dollars a year—and remember! in coming forward as a community like this, and starting a Hospital in Finlay you're doing a thing that will attract the attention of the whole West. So far as I know Finlay Hospital will be the only farmers' Hospital run for nobody's benefit but their own,—the only prairie Cottage Hospital in the whole province. It's a better thing than putting a new railroad through the country, and no whit less of a bit of pioneering.'

There was laughter at this and some

references to company land. Two young fellows insisted they were dependent on each other, wouldn't one insurance suit their case?

The Doctor's lips twitched, 'How's that?' he inquired, 'you've both got your homesteads, haven't you? You look independent enough.'

Dependent on each other, they explained for—well for companionship, and that sort of thing. Hustled out of it with cries and laughter the girls got hold of them on the fringe of the circle. Then Wilson spoke up and gave his name as a subscriber. One by one about twelve others followed. The response was hardly general. Half the men in Liston's audience knew they would never make a surplus ten dollars until machinery instalments were paid off, lien notes taken up, and bumper crops the rule rather than the exception. A few others wanted to fathom his game, first.

There seemed to be sceptic hesitation here and there, and Liston noticed a downcast face of rather surly thoughtfulness in the immediate neighbourhood of Carter. When he spoke again it was quite a few moments before he recaptured attention in that quarter.

The doctor had never troubled himself as to whether the subject would have any interest for Sandra's rejected suitor or not. That the man had joined the circle of his listeners might be a matter of the idle curiosity. So long as Ansell kept clear of

Gopher Creek he had no further quarrel with him, and for a moment a glance bereft of anything but the indemnity of the general situation rested on the other's attentive, non-committal face.

'The point about a thing like this,' he continued, 'is to distribute the responsibility for its maintenance. If everybody did their little bit (and the more we had doing it the better it would be) one or two wouldn't have to do all. You can easily see that. With six hundred subscribers the subscription would drop to five dollars, with *three thousand*, to *one*!'

Ansell Carter shifted his position, and there was a pause. Liston wondered what assistance the man could afford if he would. More than anyone else there, probably.

Then Will Loundsbury made a suggestion.

'Now perhaps if you were to ask for the names of the men who would be *willing* to do this thing, Doc,' he said, 'no matter whether they prove *able* or not, you'd have something to go upon. If you was to try for three hundred names of fellers who'd give the money if they had it, after thrashin', you'd find out two things, first if the people want the Hospital, and second, how far circumstances pure and simple is against their doing enough to run one.'

'So you would,' a politician broke in over Loundsbury's shoulder, 'an' if that there list of three hundred names wasn't document enough for the Gov'ment, I don't know what

would be! Let 'em have it, Doc! You go to the Gov'ment and say "Look 'ere, these people want a Hospital. They ain't got the means to run it—it's up to you to see them through. We don't want no thousands of dollars spent on model pigstyes at the Experimental Farm, we wants three thousand of them dollars right here in Finlay (—its the same Department, the agricultural Department—) we want them three thousand dollars spendin' on the health of our women an' children. They're more important than pigs, and we can afford to lose 'em less. When the day comes as we can put up that three thousand dollars ourselves we shan't be slow to let you know. We ain't askin' charity. We're askin' *Gov'ment*. We ain't paupers, we're pioneers and colonists and up against all the propositions of pioneerin' and colonisin'."

Jerry the socialist could hardly be heard weighing against the 'robbery' of the Government having any moneys to spend at all, (moneys of his, Jerry's), for the applause which greeted this spirited peroration.

The Doctor was struck by it, too. The whole thing, of course, would stand or fall on the question of money.

That's a downright good notion of yours, Bawlf,' he said, 'I wish I'd thought of it before. I believe I should have had a hundred names last week from Dewbury

alone. Hunch yourselves, then, boys, and get me the names—here's some paper,' tearing leaves from his pocket-book.

'Ladies names too——?' Everyone liked this interlude, and there was no dearth of pencils.

Liston considered.

'No, only the men—'

'I like that!' screamed a woman's lively voice, 'as if the men's names would mean much without their wives!' They might *promise* the money, *but we'd see they paid it!* Ours are the guarantee!'

'You're admirable, Mrs Barr,' said Mr Aldersey, suavely, deliciously appreciative. 'I only wish I had your persuasive powers. What do you say, Dr Liston?'

'Why,' very gravely, 'I say Mrs Barr is the one to tackle the Government. She and Jerry—'

The little woman shouted again with laughter.

'Me and Jerry—I like that! Why now, Doctor, don't you know what would happen before we got half way there?—(and Jerry wouldn't have much of a say if we *did* get there, *I'd* take care of that!) We'd fall out half way. Jerry would want to reform the Government and I would want funds for Finlay Hospital, and like the man and his wife who quarrelled a week over whether they'd have red or blue paper in the parlour (he wanted red, and she wanted blue) we'd

compromise, in the end, on the blue, that is we'd compromise, Jerry and me, on the funds.'

'I'm sure of that, Mrs Barr,' Liston said, 'that's why you ought to go.'

Her merry face shadowed suddenly, and her voice dropped.

'I'd do anything to help, really Doctor.' Her eyes filled with tears. 'We lost our little one, you know, and I buried him with my own hands to spare Barr having to do it.'

The man glanced at her with the Doctor's sympathy a woman must be a prude to resent.

'You're young yet, Mrs Barr,' he said. Whimsical laughter sprang back into her face.

'I'll never have another,' she returned, glancing away from him, 'they got the vet for me when little Abe was born—and—and—things went wrong somehow. He was only an amateur vet.'

Liston was at a loss to comfort her.

'You'll come on our Committee . . . ' he suggested.

'There was Alice Hammond,' she pursued, shaking her head, 'she had no child for two years, Doctor, and the loneliness away up in the bush nearly drove her mad. She just knitted a sock over and over again with all the wool she had, and when that was finished, she undid it and began again. Then a baby was coming—I don't suppose any old dying dynasty ever wanted one so badly—

and she was as happy as a queen. When they told her it was born dead, she just shut her eyes and died herself. Hammond sold out and went to B.C.'

'I know,' he said, 'I know, Mrs Barr. Don't tell any of these things to Sandra.'

The name-collectors began to turn in their lists of signatures. Mr Aldersey was jubilant with twenty.

'It really was an excellent suggestion. I imagine you had already thought of approaching some of the authorities?'

'Vaguely,' Liston returned, bestowing the leaflets with great care in a letter-case, 'but I haven't much idea who the right authorities may be or how to get at them. There must be organised sources of assistance, granted a place or body has done its best, locally. This gives me something better to go upon, as Bawlf said, than our bank account, and in any case I rather meant to go up to Edmonton next week to attend the Medical Conference. Someone there might put me up to the ropes.'

'You will find it previously necessary, rather, that someone there should put you up to a bed. There's never a room to be got in the whole city in Fair week—perhaps you didn't know? They commandeer all sorts of public places, schools, assembly rooms and what not, and the hotels charge four dollars a night.'

Liston said he had made no arrangements

but left it to chance. It was second nature with him to leave his own convenience to chance.

Mr Aldersey's gesture of despair was comic. 'I might offer you a note to Drane at the Clergy House,' he said, 'but I'm morally certain they'd be full up there.' He fell back on his wife for advice.

For a moment Ethel, too, looked her dismay, then a bright thought irradiated her tired, selfless face. She was gloriously untidy by this time and her dress was jammy. With a little gasp she declared Miss Folness of the Blue Moon Tea-Room would be *sure* to know of a bed, even at the eleventh hour. 'Do go to her, Doctor, and if you care to mention our name I *know* you won't have to sleep in the street.'

The groups about them were breaking up now the serious 'event' of the day had come off. A few men lingered to comment further on the Hospital scheme, and more than one woman took advantage of the opportunity to 'speak' to Liston and ask if the place were likely to be opened by such and such a time.

His next care was Timmy and a plunge in the lake down where the men were bathing. After that it had to be settled about Bob and Maggie, so that he should have Sandra to himself going home.

CHAPTER V

THE AUTHORITIES THAT BE

A DAY or so after the picnic at Louise Lake, Dr Liston took the night train up to Edmonton. It went through Finlay about one o'clock, and as he would arrive at the provincial capital before seven, George contented himself with a day coach and saved the extra fare on a sleeper.

Little economies had begun to mean a good deal to him now he was sacrificing so much time to this Hospital affair.

It was nearly four years since Liston had been in a train, and the novelty of getting away from Finlay, that tiny hamlet which had grown up under his nose since he first came 'out' and West, kept him waking, and ready for the tenderly beautiful fresh dawn when it shone smiling over prairie country new to him and yet always familiar.

Stranger still was it to find himself in a city, and jostled in a quarter of a mile of its streets by more people than he had seen all at one time for all that length of years. He headed straight for Jasper Avenue, and coming into it opposite the Alberta Business College, went over there as a fellow traveller had suggested to him, in search of temporary

quarters. He was turned away. There was no room. He dropped into the Windsor for breakfast and made another enquiry there. Again to no purpose; even the rotunda, they told him, was occupied at night. He walked the entire length of the busy bustling thoroughfare, hot in the strong morning sunshine, from somewhere down the Namayo Avenue end of it to Ninth Street, where the Strathcona* cars come into Edmonton from across the river, without finding a place where they could put him up.

After this he abandoned the search for a room, never doubting but that before night-fall the problem would somehow solve itself, and made enquiries instead as to the whereabouts of the High School where the Medical Conference was being held. He got a copy of the Bulletin and ran his eye down the list of medical men assembled in the city. There were five hundred of them, from every province in the country, and a few of the more famous from Montreal and 'down East' were to deliver some very attractive lectures. He made a note of two men from districts east and west of Finlay, whom he might, at a crisis, look upon as the nearest consultants, and resolved to 'get acquainted.' He learnt more still about the Conference when he hunted up its headquarters at the city offices of the Board of

* Since this story was written Strathcona has become South Edmonton.

Health, and secured its programme for the week.

A full programme it was, too, varied from the clinical, surgical, obstetrical, osteopathological, and hygienic point of view by interpolated jaunts round Edmonton, garden parties under the united auspices of the leading doctors' wives, trips on the Saskatchewan, and to the coal mines, visits to the Fair with specially reserved seats in the Grand Stand for the races, a railway jaunt to the Yellowhead Pass westwards in the Rockies, sermons from the most distinguished among them in all the leading pulpits on Sunday—varied generally (so Liston surmised) with a number of municipally hospitable opportunities for 'figuring on' something as to real estate in the twin cities!

Liston's eye was caught by an announcement for that very morning of a lecture by a Mr Sturgess of Wheatopolis, U.S.A. on Hospital planning. This, with respect to Finlay having been just one of those subjects upon which his Board had appointed him to serve in solitary committee, he resolved to attend the lecture.

A long walk away from the principal parts of the city took him across the railway line again and out into a district of newly built houses, fresh, often fanciful, and not at all unpicturesque with their brown and green stained 'shingles.' It led to an ambitious outstanding pile of red-brick buildings sur-

rounded by nothing but raw prairie and the wooden sidewalks of the roughly ploughed roads, which crossed each other at right angles, allotting to the fine new High School, with its towers and freestone facings, its own square on the chessboard of a fine new western town.

A stream of men were making for the entrance, and every moment fresh motor cars ran the danger of doing their mechanism some irreparable injury as they bounded and jolted up to deposit overcrowded loads of laughing jovial medicos, and hail-fellow-well-met young surgeons on the plank pathway which led over the field to the doors.

Guided by the general trend of this advance, Liston made his way to the central hall, a spacious apartment with a gallery at the back, and a platform with separate entrances fronting an auditorium with a seating capacity for about five hundred. It was now in darkness, for Mr Sturgess' lecture had just begun, and slides showing complicated ground plans and grandiose elevations were already passing across the screen as he talked. The air was redolent of smoke although here and there the enormous hat of a lady M.D. sometimes blotted out for those behind her the precise excellencies of his work Mr Sturgess wished to impress upon the faculty.

George Liston followed the lecture with close interest, not indeed that any of this

stuff could have the remotest bearing on Finlay, but out of sheer unaccustomed pleasure to find himself once more in an academic milieu, and in touch with larger ambitions, unfettered possibilities, and big accomplishments. Mr Sturgess was not remarkable as a lecturer, but his work as a hospital architect was in keeping with most American ideals. When the lecture was over George hung about in the hall until he should appear, and presently found an opportunity to speak to him. There was an exchange of cards, and the good-looking architect with a touch of grey about the temples rather like powder on his dark hair, seemed agreeably ready to talk.

He and Liston drifted up the hallway, and, lost like everybody else in the coming and going between lectures and demonstrations, finding no room to go and sit in, squatted at last on a flight of cold stone steps. There they played at cross purposes for awhile, Mr Sturgess unconsciously exasperating Liston with stories of magnificent plans submitted to, and passed by, beneficent financing millionaires, the prairie doctor only giving the other pause when no sparks seemed to be struck out of him.

'That last plan I threw on the screen now,' pursued Sturgess, voluble and enthusiastic, 'a committee of doctors came to me one day and said that Mr Porter had authorised them to draw out a scheme for a new tuberculosis

hospital on the south side of the city, and promised he would build and equip the place from top to bottom to the tune of something like two million dollars. Of course the doctors' ideas were a bit expansive and ambitious, and by the time they were through with me, our estimates topped that figure by quite a bit. When it came to waiting upon Mr Porter with this plan and this estimate none of the doctors felt much like it, and pushed the job on to me. I didn't feel much like it either, so the proposition hung fire for a day or two, and then one fine morning Mr Porter comes down to my office, and asks what we're waiting for. So I get out the plans and show them to him. He is delighted and I pluck up courage to tell him the figure they'll cost.

"Well," he says again, "what are you waiting for, Sturgess? Cut right ahead!"

That's the sort of man Mr Porter is. Of course he's made me; I've drawn the plans for six of his hospitals. Another time when they wanted a new hundred bed wing at the——

'I wonder if it would be any use my getting after Mr Porter,' said Liston, 'Finlay would hardly figure in his calculations.' He turned his pipe over thoughtfully and knocked out the bowl on the step.

'Why no,' assented the architect half mistaking him, 'Mr Porter spends his money on his native city. He's a real lovely

philanthropist, but his charity begins to home.'

If a criticism crossed the Doctor's mind he dismissed it more readily than the folk in the Finlay district dismissed suspicions of theirs as to Liston's own disinterestedness.

'Well,' he said quietly. 'I've no doubt we've as many millionaires and philanthropists right here in Canada as you have across the line, Mr Sturgess. What I've got to do is to find 'em.'

Mr Horatio P. Sturgess turned over the matter of this very small fry in his mind for a moment, and then with an air caught from the patronage of his patron enquired what Liston calculated to do about plans. The Doctor felt, instinctively, this was impersonal. He produced a rough sketch on a half page of his note-book and handed it to the American without remark.

The little plan worked out by the light of Mrs Maloney's kitchen lamp, the night before he left Finlay was, probably, beneath Sturgess' notice. Liston merely chanced some useful comment on it since he had no mind to incur architect's fees for professional blue prints.

Sturgess' mind, the victim evidently, of megalophilia (George coined the term as he watched him) scarcely bent itself to take in these simple pencilled lines. Cubes had no interest for him after odd tangents designed to catch the maximum of sun in certain

aspects, which gave him wards here and there like segments of a wheel!

He handed back the sketch plan, with an eye now on the passers-by for bigger guns at the conference than the rather shabby Liston.

'You know Harrison in Edmonton here, I suppose,' he suggested, 'he's a good man and would do the thing for you, probably, at a special fee. I would give you a line to him—or my card would be enough—?'

Liston accepted the suggestion, and rose. One thing might lead to another in a quest like his, and if an architect's assistance should really prove a *sine qua non* (and drainage was an awfully knotty point for the committee of one) he might at least find someone to put up that fee.

He wandered round the lecture rooms on leaving Sturgess and spent some time in the 'exhibition gallery' where half-a-dozen druggists' concerns were represented by attractive stalls. A girl gave him a specimen of patent invalid food cockered up like an ice, and disguised with choc'late. Liston pocketed the largest sample of it offered; reaped quite a harvest of sorts before he strolled out again, and wished his Hospital dispensary had been ready to benefit by these depredations. There was not much point about bulging pockets or hairbreadth advantages so far as his own office was concerned. Incidentally he caught the name of one of the men

he had wished to meet, and came face to face with him opposite a stall of surgical appliances.

'Dr. Farnworth I believe—?'

A fair, round-headed man looked up at him with no very friendly expression in the eyes, and admitted he had guessed the identity of his interrogator some minutes earlier. Dr Farnworth was a handsome man after a certain type, and rather smartly dressed.

'You're Liston, aren't you, from Finlay,' he remarked. 'I've heard of you.'

From the way he mentioned it, he might have heard of George bungling an operation. The other was quick to note the antagonism, but quite ready to disarm it.

'Doesn't matter what you've heard of me,' he observed, mildly. 'Though I should hope—on the prairie—the information was first hand?'

'As to that, you know how news gets around. Neither you nor I, I should imagine, have much time for editing it.'

The insinuation, somehow, was insulting.

'Frankly,' Farnworth pursued, as Liston had given him the opening, 'I think your whole scheme's a fool scheme.'

'You evidently haven't heard of it first hand then. Perhaps if you had, your judgment would be more moderate.' Liston was annoyed, but why should he give himself or Finlay away?

'Finlay will never amount to much anyway,' said Farnworth. 'That's no place to build a Hospital.'

'The Hospital at Finlay, is not exclusively for Finlay,' Liston returned, with a touch of sarcasm, 'you evidently know little of the proposal. Little enough to condemn it, it seems.'

'You'll never run it,' the other went on. 'You'll never get any trained nurse to take charge there, when she could get twice the money in half the time elsewhere—in a town.'

'That is a problem time will solve, like the rest,' Liston said. 'Do you suppose I haven't weighed all these objections, and lots more, before letting the place in for an undertaking which—if they *don't* prove superable, will cover it with ridicule, or burden it with a white elephant?'

Dr Farnworth made a gesture. It was immaterial to him what Liston had or had not done.

George, again, felt annoyed. This was not the spirit in which he had expected to be met by the men near enough to him, to take all the premises of the thing for granted. He spoke of the Insurance scheme, and instantly laid bare the secret of Farnworth's rancour. Hitherto, he had advanced nothing substantial, and the other knew it.

'Harebrained,' Farnworth stigmatised this curtly. 'Bound to fail. It's hard enough

for us prairie practitioners to live, anyway, you don't need to undersell us everywhere, to suggest all round the townships, that we know the farmers can't afford doctoring. Let them understand they've got to pay, and they will pay.'

Liston thought over this for a moment. There were men, he knew, who scrupled nothing to charge a prairie woman five dollars for lancing a baby's gum. He had heard of a man demanding forty dollars for bandaging a wrist. One young farmer was only able to take his ailing wife to town to consult a doctor when a relative died and a little windfall in the shape of a legacy from England came his way. And then it was too late : the woman's doom was sealed.

The whole idea of the hospital at Finlay was to bring the benefit of medical assistance somewhere within the reach of people like this. Liston had never conceived of his profession as a mere alternative to any other way of making money, and in such a connection he had a little esprit de corps. He glanced at Farnworth with something like a dry sense of self congratulation that this should be so. It was easy enough, if surprising, to see how the wind blew, and that, after all, was something to have discovered.

Dr Farnworth hesitated a moment, toying with a sample of Sanatogen. Then, 'Look here, Dr Liston,' he said, with a change of manner ; 'I'm not saying that your scheme

hasn't anything in it, but you're setting about the whole thing in the wrong way. Suppose you were to turn it into a Company now, and issue shares——?'

George's face assumed an expression Farnworth was in no position to recognise.

'I'm not out for these everlasting dollars,' he said. 'Run Finlay Hospital as a dividend earning concern, and I chuck it up from the word "go".'

The other smiled, 'Not many of us are out for theatricals,' he retorted. '——Well, you wanted my opinion, apparently, and you've got it, straight! The whole scheme's just a fool scheme, and you'll never put it through. Good morning.'

With a nod which he just managed to save from being only less offensive than no leave taking at all, Farnworth turned on his heel.

Liston, too, could be brusque if he liked. He had scarcely waited for this iteration of Farnworth's disbelief. An idealist, albeit a very practical one, George had not come thus far on the road towards this Finlay Hospital without discovering that none accompanied him. The spiritual content of the work was all his own. How far Sandra might prove capable of sharing it only the storms, crises, and dilemmas ahead would show. He believed she would stand the test perforce of her love, as perhaps Ethel Aldersey would stand it too, in other circumstances, perforce of the mere breeding she

had which always tells at a crisis, and of a fine nature trained to high standards. He thought of the two women for a moment—Sandra, such a child still, save for those depths of potential maternity in her, and Mrs Aldersey, capable perhaps, of the sacrifices of a nun. Why, if the worst came to the worst, and trained nurses really turned up their noses at Finlay, he would impress Sandra, borrow Ethel, and bully Mrs Maloney into staffing that little hospital!

With all the possibilities of the capital before him as yet unexplored, (he jotted down a memorandum about this matter of nurses), the next step to take, if time were any object, was the obvious one, the one which had immediately presented itself. So, as a matter of fact, on leaving the High School, he made his way back to Jasper Avenue and to the architect there.

Mr Harrison, a suave bearded man, received Dr Liston in his private office, and unlike Sturgess, declared it an advantage to an architect, sometimes, to have any such plan as this little one of the proposed prairie Hospital to go upon in elaborating something a 'trifle—well, let us say, a trifle more professional.' His manner was engaging, and his interest in the undertaking whose scope Liston was drawn to outline more fully than he had done to the showy American, was at once surprised and real.

'It might be worth your while, Mr Harrison,

to do this little piece of work for Finlay,' the Doctor said, surprised himself that he cared to persuade, 'because the thing is more or less unique, I believe, and if it should be a success, both the plan and the maintenance scheme should offer a good working model for other places.'

Mr Harrison smiled, and his gesture was slightly dissentient.

'My dear Dr Liston, if you refer to kudos I have no doubt I shall get all that is coming to me in doing these plans for you, but as far as fees are concerned I shall be very happy to waive that matter altogether. It is frequently done in the case of churches, and personally I have more sympathy with building hospitals than churches. If a man's religion is a real thing to him he can take it with him to the Pole, but if a man loses his health out here on our prairies, it's all up with him.'

A flush of real pleasure gave Liston's usually rather pale and inscrutable face unwonted animation. He uttered few thanks—the matter was not remotely personal—but fell at once to discussion of points that had puzzled him on this plan.

'Drainage—' it was a leading question, of course, and Mr Harrison's notebook lay at his elbow.

'Sublimely and beautifully none,' Liston owned, 'we fester in the rabbit hutch system at Finlay, and the refuse ground is only half-a-

mile, outside the village. Hence typhoid. We had a case of diphtheria last spring.'

Sanitary details occupied them awhile, and the difficulties appeared negotiable. The architect told Liston to see the Manager of the Sommerville Hardware up-town, and get him to 'donate' a bath and fixings . . . It seemed that a staircase wider than the dimensions allowed by George, thinking only of stretchers, would be necessary (unless they were to have a second one outside) if Finlay Hospital set its hopes at all on the Government grant. A six-foot stairway and fire hand-grenades on both floors would meet the requirements in this respect of the Provincial Health Authority.

Mr Harrison leaned back in his chair to do justice to the diversion introduced by his mention of the grant.

'Suppose you leave all this to me,' he said at last, laying his hand upon the plans and papers, 'and devote yourself to the rest of the business? There's lots of it before you, and the first thing you've got to do is to go straight down to the Parliament Buildings and see the Premier. Sound him as to the possibility of elaborating any real Government policy with regard to all this sort of thing—it ought not to be left as a matter of private initiative and personal enterprise, whether of a town or of an individual. See Craig, the Minister of Agriculture, as the whole thing comes, properly, in his department, and

Barton at the Provincial Health Office. You had better get after your own Member, too, because, later on when it comes to incorporation you will want him to give notice of a private Bill. Then you ought to see the Minister of Telephones, that'll be an important matter, and certainly the Lieutenant Governor, to head a subscription list perhaps

Liston felt he had struck the right trail at last and no mistake! For the moment even his well-balanced brain spun with visions, and he saw his little Hospital a bravely accomplished fact, hoisted as it were on the shoulders of important Government men, as a new standard in provincial progress.

'There's Murray, again,' Harrison pursued, 'the Commissioner of Immigration. I see he's in the city just now on departmental business, and it's a wonder if the whole Hospital and Nursing proposition of the entire west doesn't lie on his official conscience like lead. He's a fine fellow and will be delighted to have a talk with you if ever you can find or catch him.'

George fumbled for a moment. 'What about introductions to all these people,' he asked, and betrayed the Englishman, 'I don't know a soul in the city.'

Mr Harrison laughed.

'Walk right in, every time,' he advised. 'Governor Warren will probably open the door to you himself. And mind you see

Black, the Archdeacon. He's an old timer here and has more weight with our other old timers, who are mostly all millionaires by now, than anyone in the city. Took out a license as a newsboy the other day in order to belong to his own club for the newsboys. A fine man, that. Then get after the resident medical men—I should like you to meet Dalton. He has some ideas of his own, I believe, about bringing pressure to bear on the Government to increase this Hospital grant.'

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Out in the hot street again Liston felt the thing accomplished—given a mountain of work put through here in Edmonton. It seemed odd that he had schemed and thought so hard all these months at Finlay, striven like a nigger to make bricks with the scanty local supply of straw, when here, up in the capital, all the materials, apparently, lay ready to his hand.

It was three o'clock by now, and the need, not only of a meal, but of a rest, or at least of some place where he could be quiet a bit and reduce some of all this advice to a plan of campaign, made Liston inclined to swear at a room being so hard to find. He tried the institution whose big letters Y.M.C.A. beckoned him down a whole long street; went into the Immigration Hall beside the station, and rang the bell at

half-a-dozen doors of 'rooming' houses with no more success than had attended the same search earlier in the day. He was just about to give it up, and take the street car over to Strathcona, when his eye was caught by the sign of the Blue Moon.

He went upstairs and found himself in a spacious tea-room, furnished in excellent semi-artistic style and set out with inviting little tables. Liston deposited his rather weary length at one of them, and gave an order. A place like this was a departure, indeed, for the West, where meals all falling within given hours at the hotels, are not to be had at odd times. It was early yet for tea, and few of the other tables were occupied. Over by the window, however, four ladies sat together holding some sort of a little symposium, for their cups and plates had ceased to interest, and they talked with animation. One of them, a very distinguished looking woman of middle age with decorative grey hair nursed an enormous black cat. Opposite her a little lady dressed in some light summer costume which suited her to perfection, had her veil pushed up over the brim of her hat, and the grey eyes which laughed as spontaneously as her lips were alight with intelligence and sense. On either side, again, sat two ladies who recalled to Liston the well-bred, well-dressed girls he had met taking his sisters about, at home in the old country, and in the saloon of the *Oshanda*.

Presently he enquired of the waitress if Miss Folness were not the head of this establishment. Could he see her, for a moment—here was his card?

'That's Miss Folness over there, the one with the cat,' the girl replied, 'shall I take it across?'

The lady glanced at Liston's little paste-board on which the Alderseys had scribbled a line, rose immediately and came to him. She took a seat at his table and expressed pleasure at meeting any friend of theirs. He had come up for the Conference, she supposed, and the Fair?

The Conference, he admitted, but hardly the Fair, and told her the object of his visit in as few words as were necessary. It would be awkward to do without a bed for a week, and she could judge of the length of time it would take him to do half the business in hand. Mrs Aldersey had thought Miss Folness might be able to suggest someone who could put him up, and it really seemed he would have to avail himself of her good offices—?

'But you most interesting man!' exclaimed Miss Folness, 'come right over here and be introduced. You must tell us this story all over again! Yes, of course I'll find you a bed. You shall sleep here in the tea-room on the lounge.'

She carried him over to the other table where the three ladies turned expectant faces.

'Dr Liston,' said Miss Folness introducing him to the little lady with the veil, 'Miss Theodora Ward, the Premier's Secretary, Miss Tennant on the reporting staff of the *Journal*, and Miss Alma Norway, a graduate Nurse.'

George bowed, a little overwhelmed by this avalanche of luck.

'Oh, I beg your pardon!' exclaimed Miss Folness, 'and Mr Rooty-Tooty—my cat. Pray don't sit on him.'

CHAPTER VI

A PRAIRIE CAPITAL

THE old Parliament Building at Edmonton is a large but unpretentious red edifice, standing on the lower ground at the foot of a long steep descent from the north side of the city towards the river bed. The new Parliament Buildings which crown a commanding height half-way above it, and overlook the dismantled old fort of the Fur Trading Company, (in 'olden times' the scene of many a fierce quarrel between Crees and Blackfoot Indians, and white men too), which first made this a distributing centre in the far North-West, are majestic in proportions and commanding in design. A high-flung cupola, reminiscent of Wren, columns of cool grey stone, wide entablatures, and cornice lines admirable above rows of severe and simple windows, give the mass of the new Parliament Buildings both close at hand beneath them, and from afar in any bird's eye view over the course of the broad and winding North Saskatchewan, a dignity befitting the Empire building they represent,

as Edmonton herself represents a new nation, and all the prairie territories tributary to the city, a new world. Lord Grey laid the foundation stone in 1908, and it was expected that part of the Buildings would be sufficiently far advanced to permit of the Legislative Assembly holding their session within its walls four years later. As yet few Governmental departments are installed there, although Dr Liston found the deputy Minister of Rural Municipalities already in a very new and roomy office, and had a chat with Cartwright, the Member for the constituency in which Finlay was situated, in the hushed library whose thousands of books, still in process of classification and arrangement, brought with them a ready-made studious atmosphere.

For the rest, most of the interviews Mr Harrison had suggested took place in the old Parliament Buildings, and Liston was kept in the city well over his contemplated week before he compassed half of them. Miss Folness was camping out for the summer in a tent among the trees down by the river, and the doctor remained, her very informal guest after business hours, up at the Blue Moon. The three other ladies he met that first day at her tea-table, constituted themselves a sort of Advisory Committee straight away, and followed his adventures with constant interest. Miss Tennant offered a 'write up' for his Hospital

scheme in the *Journal* the moment he might consider publicity in the press of service to it, and Miss Norway and her brother took him to the races at the Fair, one day, as a set-off to the extreme seriousness and importance of some other conversations they had held. If Liston was in earnest about Finlay, he found in this charming and chirpy girl a combination of administrative capacity, buoyant-heartedness and professional finish, which would make her an ideal little Matron there—had the time been ripe to offer this responsible post to a lady of her mature twenty-four years.

Theodora Ward, the Premier's Secretary, stood in a class apart, even among these bright women of a bright new city. She had a statesmanlike grasp of the import of this task of his, compassed every interview he wanted with the provincial Ministers, and debated the subject with him, down there in her office, day by day afresh as executive comment from this quarter or from that was passed upon it, building it up, or leaving it as much upon his own shoulders as ever. One day she urged him to bring the whole matter before the Local Council of Women, and this was the only suggestion of Theodora Ward's which he did not adopt. It yet remained to be seen whether all the wonderfully suggestive means indicated to him from so many sources of realising this project at Finlay, were not amply adequate to the

task. Why complicate it by submitting it to the criticism of a body of women? Miss Ward forebore to press the point. A woman living much behind the scenes of Provincial Government life, her intellect that of a keen politician, her interests wholeheartedly and very loyally those of the Office in whose ante-chamber she sat, she may have felt it might suggest a certain forlornness about Liston's cause, if this Hospital business, all its claims and possibilities, were to be referred anywhere else too soon in the day. Liston moreover did not strike her as a man likely to be for long at a loss if he found a dead calm where he expected a wind. She kept the reflection to herself, and asked the Doctor questions instead about a little colony of Ruthenians living 'away away' out on the confines of the Finlay district. The lot of the immigrant Ruthenian, it seemed, claimed a good share of Miss Ward's concern.

Talking to her one morning in the expectation that the Premier himself would accord him a few moments between a series of deputations, Liston was not kept waiting long.

The double doors opened presently to allow someone to pass out, and the Doctor found himself invited into a dignified apartment high and wide and long, furnished as to walls and flooring in dark reposeful green, where a solitary gentleman,

partially bald, and dressed in a suit of light neat grey, was retreating to his desk.

The solitary gentleman, Liston concluded, was the Premier.

Miss Ward had, he believed, effected his presentation, but unused to the democratic simplicity of official Canadian life, he found himself for the moment nonplussed. (Fancy parading down Whitehall, he thought, and being calmly admitted to Downing Street or anywhere else, in London, like this !)

Then as unhurriedly as he might have addressed his own Committee, George thanked Mr Silcox for this interview, and believed he knew its purport ?

The Premier leaned back in his chair with quiet courtesy and signed to him to proceed. He was aware of some of the matter, perhaps, and in a few words begged to be informed what service Liston desired that he should render.

George stated the prairie case for which Finlay, here and now, he felt, might stand for an example in point, and enquired whether there were any departmental sources of assistance for outlying districts and nascent towns throughout the Province when these set out to build hospitals.

The Premier followed him with the attention a man of observation and of few words will always accord another of the same calibre. Every now and again he shot a keen look at the Doctor—the look of a barrister when unimpeachable integrity

surprises his instinct for an unworthy motive—and once or twice he raised strong interrogative brows. His manner was extraordinarily self-contained. Then Liston spoke of prairie hardship, and a slight smile, of reminiscent recognition perhaps, crossed the thoughtful, clean-shaven face.

'My dear sir,' he put in quietly, 'I lived for fifteen years on the prairie myself, in a little shack with the stove pipe going up through the roof.'

He opened a drawer on the left hand side of the desk, took out a couple of bills and passed them to Liston.

'A private matter—'

'I scarcely see in what other way I can be of use to you at present. The Government makes a grant of twenty-five cents a day per patient for country hospitals, and somewhat higher than that, I believe, for those in the city here, but it certainly does not undertake to build them. We should—at that rate—have no money for anything else.'

George Liston took the dollar bills recognising in them a personal sympathy, all the more encouraging because of its quasi-official source. But the gift, handsome inauguration as it might be of any collection he must make in Edmonton towards the building fund, solved nothing of the riddle about maintenance. He laid the soiled little sheets of Louise Lake signatures upon Mr Silcox's desk and enquired, the farmers'

deputy as it were, if in the event of a failure of crops, government assistance temporary or otherwise, might be hoped for by a Hospital Board faced with bankruptcy.

'I scarcely think it.' The Premier's negative air was conclusive.

'Even,' the Doctor pressed, 'in the case of an institution like the one we hope to build at Finlay, an institution run on unique lines, whose success or failure might prove to be of vital moment to the whole Nursing problem of the prairies—?'

'How so?' remarked the Premier. 'I understand various experiments are being made now in this matter of District Nursing. What may be unique about the Finlay plan?'

'No unattached Nurse can hope to make a living among farmers who can only pay her in kind—if at all,' replied the doctor who had heard something of these experiments and their failures, from Alice Folness, 'but if she uses a Cottage Hospital as a basis of operations, and accepts her salary from the Board, all the advantages of District Nursing are secured to the people, while the Nurse herself is spared the expense of rooming out, and anxiety as to remuneration. I have only lately begun to consider this aspect of the problem, but the more I think of it, the more I hope to see Finlay staffed with one resident Nurse—two if necessary—and one District Nurse. It all depends on

the income of course. The people themselves want to know if there is any help likely to be forthcoming from a government source, if their efforts to provide enough are insufficient. Those seventy names before you would amount to a guarantee of seven hundred dollars, from one district alone, if those seventy men make anything at all of a turn-over after the harvest.'

Mr Silcox's negative was, again, conclusive.

'For the simple reason,' he explained 'that no provincial Treasury could afford the precedent. The question would not be one of a timely thousand or so to Finlay—but of millions, my dear Sir, up and down the country. The more so,' he added with a slight smile, 'if, as you surmise, the example of Finlay is likely to be extensively copied.'

Liston distinctly felt caught. But to argue the point would be futile as to argue with a machine—the machine in this case being no more controlled in reality by the man who sat there before this desk, than it was controlled by himself as a voter. He rather wondered what Mrs Barr would have done under the circumstances.

'Personally,' the Premier observed again, 'I do not believe any scheme is on a sound basis that supplies the need of a people without their co-operation, otherwise the thing to do, of course, would be to get a Hospital of this sort endowed.'

'A ~~partial~~ endowment will probably be indispensable, Mr Silcox. This would destroy the argument about pauperising, while at the same time it would secure the little institution from opening and shutting in spasms of local finance. But how even partial endowment is to be secured above and beyond the immediate business of building fund and maintenance problem, escapes me as yet.'

The Premier was still turning over the leaves of Jerry's 'document.' Likely enough some of the names were known to him

'You haven't applied to the Canadian Order, I suppose,' he enquired.

'For Nurses? Well it's a little early yet—'

'No, no, I meant for financial assistance. There is a fund,' he pursued as Liston seemed unaware of this, 'called the Youville Cottage Hospital Fund in the administration of the Order, which, I fancy, would exactly fit your case. You should make some enquiries. That might prove a more likely source—'

It was characteristic of Mr Silcox that he could close an abortive interview on a hopeful note. He threw out this suggestion with no intention at all of volunteering the further information he possessed. It was likely to be of more value to Dr Liston, at least at the outset, than the couple of \$50 bills he had given him, but that was for the other to find out. Perhaps another consideration than that the Premier's office was scarcely

a bureau of information accounted for the flicker of amusement, again, with which Mr Silcox left Liston to take up this cue or leave it. The Canadian Order itself might be feeling a little sore, (like the doctor), that neither had the Alberta Government seen its official way to help them. A fellow-feeling, he wondered—would it make them wondrous kind? He came across the room once more with Liston, and expressed himself anxious to hear that the work succeeded.

There had been no hint at pressure of time, but the immediate admittance of another deputation after Liston's dismissal, and this rather exquisite way—it lacked nothing in cordiality—of intimating that only news of success at Finlay could occasion a further interview upon it, gave George a moment's misgiving as to how he might account to Mr Silcox for his \$100 if, indeed, he were going to pour it, and more, into a boot with a hole in the toe.

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Money, of course, *money*, the root of all evil, without which little good can be done, was the first, middle, and last word on this subject.

A week of interviews, and contrary to some of the expectations of that first day, Liston was not much further forward. He had arranged half-a-dozen incidentally important things, but it looked as if a regular begging

stunt up and down the city, in and out of offices, round and round the hotel rotundas (and Miss Tennant could help him here with the paper as much as she liked), would be more to the point than the lot. 'My dear Sir,' one of the big Real Estate men had said to him that very morning, 'if you want money, the way to get it is to ask for it!' The subject, apparently, would not of itself lead to this deduction—! Prepared as he was to count no cost in this business, Liston had an unconquerable repugnance to begging. It must belittle a work that should not have to resort to it! But this hint the Premier had given him about some recognised Fund was a thing to be followed up. George wondered he had never heard of it before, the Government grant, the Local Council of Women, the Canadian Order or what not. He was feeling the Hospital's way, here at the heart of things, much as he had had to feel it at Finlay, and it worried him slightly, now, to suppose that amid so many vistas opening up there were some it proved waste of time for him to follow, and yet he might—for want of being better posted himself—fail to discover the most direct road to his end. It was nobody's business to point it out to him half so much as it was his own business to hit upon it.

It was not a hard matter to get at some information about the Canadian Order—the Reports were to be had. The Appendix

interested Liston at once. But grants from the Youville Fund in aid of Hospital building, it informed him, could only be made if, in the opinion of the central executive at Ottawa, the communities or Boards applying for this assistance had already raised a fair proportion of the necessary total, locally. The maintenance difficulty was still left to take care of itself. This grant might help Finlay to start, perhaps, but how about sink or swim later on? The granting, moreover, of it would commit Finlay, naturally enough, to certain obligations towards the Order. They were light obligations, and calculated only to advance the best interests of any little Hospital incurring them—but as he read them with concentrated brows and pursed lips, Liston saw the personal equation disappear. Finlay would no longer be *his* Hospital, (the Committee had no idea it was his Hospital now, but the Committee didn't yet count), if they took a step like this . . . Not that that should matter . . . it didn't matter! The singleness of the purpose of the man was quite equal to any renunciation of the sort. What did it matter whose Hospital Finlay might be, so long as it succeeded it getting itself built? That was the main thing, and here again, it seemed like one step at a time . . .

The Finlay folk had raised about five hundred dollars, exclusive of Sandra's raid on the Special; suppose by hook or by

crook he could raise another five or six hundred, even a thousand, here in Edmonton; would the Canadian Order, he speculated, consider fifteen hundred or so earnest enough for a grant from the Youville Fund? Mr Harrison's estimates would be nowhere under five or six thousand dollars.

Liston landed Mr Murray, the genial Commissioner, with this poser over dinner that evening at the Windsor. And afterwards, ensconced in deep chairs, with their feet up in the window of the rotunda, beholding, and beheld of all outside observers, they went into it with the help of the Report. George was rapidly becoming a man of the *idée fixe*, and Murray had no better business on hand than to confirm him. He liked this young Englishman whose violent yellow pigeon-toed boots and peg-toppy Winnipeg 'pants', distinguished him from a Westerner in nothing but their prairie shabbiness. George liked Murray, a hearty humanitarian rather than a departmental official, and for the first time perhaps, felt he had touched bottom in the matter of some real moral backing.

The only thing about Murray was that he seemed so confoundedly well known, and so confoundedly popular, there were endless interruptions. . . . Murray dragged them in, too. He dragged in Benoit. . . .

An elderly man with bronzed features, grizzled hair, something of military bearing, and the poetic eyes of the most refined type

of French Canadian, was visibly impressed with George Liston's troubles.

'I have an idea,' he announced, after sufficient discussion had placed him in possession of most of the facts and queries. He drew one of the heavy chairs half fronting the others, and took a seat.

They paused for his idea.

'You know,' he said, glancing at Murray and leaning forward, 'I go to camp next week. There will be five thousand men down there. A few cents apiece from five thousand men—eh?' to Liston, 'but you need not say I suggested it. If Headquarters should permit—. It is easier to ask a few cents apiece from five thousand men, than a big sum from one or two. In the meantime, let the papers here do what they can for you. Mr Silcox's donation will give any appeal a good lead. But you should see the Editors.'

Murray brought his hand down squarely on the arm of Liston's chair.

'You go,' he ordered, 'and to prove to you that this business does lie "on my official conscience like lead", (the point had seemed to rankle), I'll get you transportation for the trip and *back*.'

They told him something about this annual training of the Canadian militia—another thing Liston knew nothing about—and Major Benoit of the 16th Battery assured him the men would not resent his

mission—'if Headquarters permit.' He considered, and still sat there considering, while the talk between Murray and the Major drifted again into civilian channels.

While the almost extreme deliberation of his thought, as much as his manner, inspired the prairie folk who sought Liston's advice, whether on a pulse or a broken whiffle-tree, with a confidence blind as it was justified, the Doctor was excessively modest. He hated professional 'side' even more than he hated the money aspect of things, and shirked naming his fees. This modesty prevented Finlay, of course, from forming any estimate of his scientific worth, and nobody there could really appreciate the work he put in 'one time', and the hours he spent over a boy's right hand shattered with gun shot in order to save it for life, as compared with an unconscientious but showy amputation. But as time went on, some element of diffidence too, crept into the man's natural reserve. The prairie might have given him a more varied practice than he had made at sea, but it cut him off as completely from the highways of the medical world, and since this Hospital scheme had begun to bulk so prominently in his thoughts, Liston realised he had scarcely kept abreast of the times, or added anything but a general practitioner's experience to the stock of knowledge with which he had achieved his M.D. He had been too poor to afford any

periodical medical journal, and an earlier scheme of his, to take a post graduate course in Montreal or London, had vanished into thin air at the Hospital's first demand on his savings. There were some lectures still to be given at this Conference for instance, on sterilising without heat, and on isotonic sea-water injections,—matters of common practice and knowledge now, of which he knew comparatively little. There might have been something more than he had divined at the time behind Farnworth's sneer, that he had 'heard of' Liston. In talking to Alma Norway, George rather fancied that she, as a Nurse, was more up-to-date than he as a medical man. She was not long out of one of the finest American training schools. He brought himself to sacrifice those last lectures at the Conference, and face the idea of getting off down to camp on the trail of these infernal dollars, if by any lucky chance it all might result in finding a girl like that to Nurse for him at Finlay. The Canadian Order grant would impose the obligation of employing a C.O. Nurse, presumably therefore one like Miss Norway, whose certificates were above question. Staunch friends as they had become in a week, Liston could only imagine that the bright little lady would have her wits as fully about her on the subject of dollars as she had on every other, and there again Farnworth might be justified.

From a personal point of view those lectures would be invaluable, but the personal point of view had already gone by the board over and over again. All he had to think about was dollars for the Hospital.

So he roused himself, and closed with Murray's offer.

CHAPTER VII

AN ARMY IN THE MAKING

It was a blazing day, and the heat was unendurable.

The camp lay outspread on the limitless plain and the wayside 'depôt' of the railroad which stretched across it straight as an arrow, from vanishing point in the west to vanishing point in the east, hummed with unaccustomed life. Anyone from South Africa—and there was a whole famous regiment here—would have recalled the entraining of units for the front at some little junction on the veldt, whose insignificance proved unequal to the indescribable confusion of strategic emergency. Long troop trains, reeking with soot and dust, crawled across the plain to Emsdale; the short sidings at the dépôt were blocked with immense freight cars, and soldiers khaki-clad swarmed in and out of the little office where the local Agent in shirt sleeves sweated and struggled with the endless sheaves of waybills, which for one fortnight in the year represented his whole official

raison d'être out there in the illimitable, and the telegraph operator put up a brave fight to retain his sanity.

Heat like the blast of an open oven reigned over the land, beat intolerably upon the wide spaces of the camp, the little platform at the *depôt*, and the shining rails. The air danced over the myriads of white tents whose lines extending in orderly sequence north, south, east, and west, blazed fiercely white under the pallid and cloudless sky. A wind charged with dust as thick as that of the desert tore roughly at the tent ropes, thundered under the awning at Headquarters, and swept away to an horizon as level, as distant, as unbroken as that of mid-ocean. A little to the rear of that part of the ground allotted to Headquarters, where the tent of the Commander-in-Chief faced the *depôt* and the railway line, a gentle slope, crowned with a few quivering poplar trees, was appropriated to the veterinary corps, and not a few horses were tethered in the scant shade. They were 'falling out' all day, only a little less frequently than the men. A fat bear cub, the mascot of the 53rd, panted in a tiny hutch, or ambled rather aimlessly as far as his tether permitted in a dusty circle.

Dr Liston tumbled out of the sweltering train, and found himself pitchforked head-first into the Emsdale camp. For Emsdale represented nothing but the camp, and the

depôt. There was no village. There had been trouble with the horses of Major Benôit's command some fifteen hours back upon the line, so George arrived with nothing but a pencilled line on one of the Frenchman's cards, introducing him to another officer. The first thing he discovered on enquiring for Colonel Bates was that Colonel Bates had, that morning, sustained a fracture, and been taken back to Winnipeg. There was nothing for it, then, but to present himself at Headquarters and take his chance. The Major who walked over with him to the Chief's tent scarcely seemed to relish the gratuitous job of presenting him, but Liston quietly forced his hand.

It was a famous soldier indeed who stood, stout, much buckled up, but immaculate and smart outside the tent in the sun. He noted his subordinate's diffidence about this civilian apparition, and stiffly acknowledged his salute and drop into the background. Liston, face to face with a man who embodied more of the regular army traditions than the whole camp beside, whose name was associated with the finest corps of semi-military police the 'bad lands' of the North American continent had ever known, submitted the object of his coming to Emsdale, and waited for the Colonel's fiat. The soldier looked perplexed, for the moment. This was something outside the ordinary scope of affairs and needed civilian

consideration. Less military, then, than the youngest of the scouts flag-wagging with pistol-like smartness in the strong wind on the hill, he turned and invited the doctor to take a seat in the tent.

It was a roomy tent, with a clean boarded floor, a little table topped with green baize, the neat camp bedstead, and one or two diminutive camp stools. At a word from the Colonel, his orderly brought a couple of glasses of iced water, and there was a pleasant tinkling in the heat.

'There's no money in camp,' he remarked, temporising, 'soldiers on active service never have any money, you know, Doctor. I haven't got any. Besides, some of my officers might object to the precedent.'

'I don't care so much about your officers, Colonel,' returned Liston soberly but noting a certain light in the soldier's eye, 'it's the men I want to get at. If they felt the thing an imposition, if they turned me down, I'd say no more. But—naturally, I can't move hand or foot without your sanction. As for them having no money, well, I think I could find out if that were so, before starting in about the Hospital at all.'

'Your idea—?'

George smiled. 'That's simple enough,' he said—'the canteen seems to be doing a roaring trade. I guess the takings up there for one day would satisfy me for Finlay.'

'This is a "dry camp" too,' observed the Colonel. 'May I ask how you propose to—er—interview the men?'

Whether the Chief were helpless in the matter or really disinclined to countenance him, Liston could not quite gather. The question seemed to beg a good deal, as though it had been intended to do so.

'On parade. If you permit,' he said.

'H'm—I could put it in the orders for the day—perhaps—'

It was terribly hot, and the Colonel loosened his collar. He touched a little bell.

'My compliments to Major Grant, and to Lieutenant-Colonel Cummings of the 18th,' he said, 'and I should be obliged to see them.'

The orderly saluted and was gone again.

'You might meet the staff after instructions this evening,' he pursued, 'we generally have a lecture about six. The matter scarcely rests entirely with me.'

George bowed, confident that with the Colonel in the chair as it were, whether he liked it or not, the matter would scarcely rest with the staff. For a few minutes they reverted to the project itself and Liston offered a name or so as credentials for his mission. In Edmonton the Lieutenant-Governor of the Province had received him as informally as the Premier, taken him as seriously as the Colonel, and written him out a substantial cheque. The soldier waved this aside.

'I know the North-West,' he said, 'there's no doubt this sort of thing is the most crying necessity of the day. Warren is a very old friend of mine.'

Three figures appeared at the opening of the tent. With quick movements of salute, one of them was gone, and the others, bending, obeyed the Chief's invitation to enter.

Colonel Scarlett did his best with the introductions. Liston was an anomaly, anyway. He got up stiffly.

'Major Grant of the 31st Field Ambulance Corps, Lieutenant-Colonel Cummings of the 18th—er, Dr Liston from some—er—unheard of place in Alberta.'

More salutes, and Liston waited to hear what the Chief made of him. It was scarcely a perspicacious performance, but served well enough.

Major Grant, a good-looking stoutish young fellow, very hot, glanced at Liston once or twice in the course of it, and seemed more curious than interested. He made no remark, but the other man, tall and well-proportioned, with a fair moustache and engaging eyes, rose to the situation at once.

'I can guarantee my men will give you a hearing,' he said, 'they're all prairie fellows and won't need many explanations. If you care to write to me at my club in Mooseberry, when Camp is over, I will send you \$50 myself.'

Colonel Scarlett rather looked as if this had let him right in for it, and no mistake.

He glanced at Major Grant.

'If you have a spare tent—' he indicated, 'for a night or so—?'

Both officers saluted. It was understood, then, Headquarters sanctioned the prairie doctor's presence in camp.

He was handed over to Grant, and as the three made their way past the various 'lines,' Colonel Cummings gave Liston a cordial invitation to his mess. 'Pass the hat round,' he insisted, 'it's a splendid cause, and my officers won't be the men I take them for if they aren't glad to hear what you've got to say. We're a very recently raised regiment, but we'll do our level best. So will all the rest—'

Young Major Grant had no inclination to dispute it. He laughed at this idea of leaving the thing to the arbitrament of the rank and file themselves, and wondered how soon Liston would be 'through.' 'We're a pretty busy camp these days,' he remarked, 'and you'll have all your work cut out to catch the men. It will have to be before revally I'm thinking.'

There were two Hospital 'lines' in camp, to the left and right of its central position on the sun-smitten rise that traversed it from east to west parallel, at some hundreds of feet distance, to the railway line. The gay

fluttering of the red cross on a little white rag of flag at the peak of a white flagstaff ringed about with freshly whitewashed stones struck a bright and dazzling note in a scene already sufficiently white and sunny.

The doctor 'Major's' capacious square tent, with its double awning and conspicuous bath tub was situated in the lines of the 31st C.F.A. Near by a luxurious motor car loafed in the heat, and in the motor car loafed the Major's familiar, half orderly, half valet, and invaluable mentor, Sam. Behind stood the Hospital, the tents of the corps, and one or two canvas isolation wards. Inside, the tent revelled in divans, cushions, cigar-boxes, a big gramophone, and here and there a volume on military surgery. Some extraordinarily smart regimentals hung against one of the poles, but even they could give little hint of the extraordinary smartness of Grant himself (and he knew it) when got up in all the gorgeous panoply of war, hotter and fatter than ever, but installed at last after a wonderful toilet—the pride of Sam's heart—in the new and creaky saddle of a mount no less well groomed and happy than his master.

He had to take the field, he apologised to Liston, and show up at the manœuvres. In the meantime a tent should be pitched where the other liked, and Sam would see to his fixings. And so the two of them, horse and

man, were off until even, likely to be vastly useful in case of sunstroke or loss of cigar, leaving George to 'look round,' and the Hospital in charge of a corporal with more or less sketchy instructions as to the holding of an ambulance class about four o'clock.

Liston availed himself of the opportunity for a sleep. Then later he got up, had an unobtrusive 'look round,' and strolled over to the mess tent to hear this ambulance instruction. The camp was empty throughout the blazing hours of the day. None of the fellows here knew who he might be, and the mere onlooking proved a huge recreation. The heat, the crush of business, and the travelling of the last ten days had jaded him. . . .

The Hospital itself was full, and a case of typhoid occupied the isolation tent in company with a few of the more blatant of the gramophone records. Six camp bedsteads faced each other on either side; to the eyes of the most casual observer the six men lying there were ill enough despite a certain amount of conversation and cheery badinage. One had a fractured leg and a broken collar-bone, the result of a bucking contest in the lines of the — Horse. Another was knocked out as only a man 'soft' from a city office can be knocked out after a day's manoeuvres on sun-cracked plains with the thermometer as high as the South African veterans in

camp had ever known it on the veldt. A 'Highlander' with very white knees, who had never seen anything more nearly resembling a mountain than the outline of a skyscraper, read *Gunga Din* on his elbow to his neighbour, a black-haired fellow with a bandaged foot. The orderlies came and went pretty frequently with cooling drinks, here renewing the ice pack about a patient's head, there adjusting a bandage.

The Corporal, a fresh-faced young fellow in the extreme of 'undress,' loitered about in the dispensary tent all among a lot of little bottles and interesting looking Red-Cross things, invariably with a glass in his hand containing nothing more professional than iced lemonade. As a dispenser, indeed, his qualifications went no further. He was one of those individuals whose singular innocence of any general knowledge whatever taken together with an unmistakeable stamp of efficiency in some particular direction, marks them out—as young naval officers for instance are marked out—for grave responsible men in their own line, but as children in all others. This one, albeit charged with the giving of ambulance instruction that afternoon, knew only less how to do that, than how to preserve military discipline. His efforts after the proper demeanour on this particular occasion (he had to remember he was an officer engaged in serious work,

rather than the fish out of water he felt, trying to teach others), availed little to rein his own appreciation of the futile comicality.

The twenty or more members of the corps busied themselves, outside in the sun, about heaven knows what, until rounded up for instruction. The trestle tables and plank seats in the mess tent were pushed to one side, and for the most part the men mounted upon them in tiers, those whom they could not accommodate disposing themselves on the ground in the oddest of attitudes. The Corporal took his stand with easy informality beside a stray chair in close proximity to two or three youths, very risibly inclined, whom he deemed it polite to ignore in the interests of his own frail tenure of dignity. They in their turn safe from discipline under the very lee of their officer, assumed such egregious idiocy that, again, decorum was best studied by avoiding ever landing them with a question. The young Instructor was not alone, however, the cynosure of all eyes in that tent, for a lanky youth of indeterminate rank, with whom he held occasionally disputatious consultations hung on his flank, one foot on the seat of the chair that served them both for a rostrum, and an eye, over his friend's shoulder, on the First Aid book to be expounded.

The method of teaching was to pounce

upon a series of utterly disconnected hypothetical casualties, (it escaped attention that many of these could happen anywhere but on the battlefield), read aloud all the book had to say about them, then close it, carefully marking the place with a thumb, and proceed to an original comment or two; if any suggested themselves. As a rule they did not, and a lucid '—see? That's what you do—see?' generally led to retirement in some confusion on the book again. No sort of relevance formed any guide as to what injury and its treatment would come next: no sort of wound or mishap was instanced as illustrating any point in elementary physiology. Whether or not the alumni of this College of Surgeons had ever heard of the circulation of the blood, or could state the difference between an artery and a vein to save their lives, they proceeded to diagnose fracture of the spine or jaw, feeling every man-jack of them from the Corporal downwards morally certain that in real circumstances the only thing they could remember of this teaching would be its infallible rule 'go for the Doctor.'

'Go for the Doctor—see? It says "go for the Doctor,"' the Corporal glanced round the tent, 'don't forget that.'

A passage followed about flesh wounds and the application of the tourniquet.

'Now then, you—Briggs,' the Instructor

remarked, launching out free of the book for a moment, and fixing somebody with the question who ought otherwise to be reprimanded for unseemly mirth—'now then you, Briggs, what would you do if you ran across a man bleeding to death from a cut in the leg?'

'Go for the Doctor,' hazarded Briggs.

'The jaw now,' pursued the Corporal, a trifle baffled at obtaining the right answer in the wrong connection, but disinclined to go back on it, "'fracture of the jaw," now then men—' glancing up again with sudden anatomical misgiving, 'you know what the jaw is, don't you—the bit that moves, like this, see?' illustrating the point.

'Or like this,' somebody interrupted, chewing cud to the utter distraction of the class.) . . .

'—All this part,' indicating the top part of his head with a hand planted there, 'is *solid*, you know. The jaw's what *moves*. How'd you find out if it was fractured?'

Silence. Nobody, apparently, had any idea. Disfigurement, broken teeth, blood, would not suggest it.

'Why, you run your finger round inside,—feel it,' and the Corporal demonstrated a method of examination likely to be resented at the hands of the 31st C.F.A. by a man shot up far worse than that.

Discussion on the casualty originating

somewhere at the back of the tent, and not at first to be distinguished from irrelevant pugilistic comment, developed into a general argument without leadership.

'Snake-bites,' pursued the Corporal by way of calling the meeting to order, 'what would you do for a snake bite?'

'Put the blue-bag on it,' ventured somebody, regardless that neither snake-bites nor blue-bags were likely to be encountered in the firing line.

'No you wouldn't. You'd give a stimulant . . . What stimulant,' (hurried glance at the book) 'would you give for a snake bite?'

'Condy's fluid, Corp'rl.' It was a sore subject, this, in a 'dry camp.'

'Condy's fluid, what's that?'

'They don't call it Condy's fluid, it's this here—' and the Referee points confidentially on the page to a more pharmaceutical name neither he nor the other care to tackle. They drop the subject and try another.

'lectric shocks.' He reads a paragraph or two explaining insulation. Gets a little confused, enlarging on it without the book, until the Referee suggests it would be better to leave contagion and infection until they came to fevers.

'Well, how'd you treat a man who'd had an 'lectric shock, if you couldn't touch him for fear you'd get it yourself. . . .?' The point was tricky to explain.

Few rose to it, but one man at length emerged from a hum of talk turning on the wonderful tricks you could do on top of a street car with a tobacco pouch. When things worked round again to the point in question, at last it was decided that you only couldn't touch him, *i.e.* the electrocuted patient, if you were standing on the ground. You could deal with him quite easily if you weren't. The conclusion that 'to remove a person suffering from electric shock' you must jump in the air and *when jumping, kick him*, seemed so little satisfactory, and yet so pertinent as to that important point about insulation, that the Corporal hurried on.

'Suppose anybody got a shock up a telegraph pole, how'd you get him down?'

Ten more minutes of chaotic discussion ended abruptly with the belated reflection that he would probably have come down by himself. . . .

Nothing further being volunteered on the subject of electric shocks, two playfully-inclined young fellows undertook to clear up the Corporal's uncertainties about the exact methods of artificially inducing respiration.

One rolled over on his stomach, and the other promptly squatted on his back. It escaped everybody's notice that the patient's convulsed features were hard pressed into the grass. Only when the demon came down a heartier bump than b

the patient's stomach—in the second posture—did the demonstration become the rough-and-tumble at which the two had aimed from the first.

Order having been somehow restored, 'fracture of the spine' next engaged the serious attention of the 31st.

'This is an exceedingly serious injury and the greatest care should be taken in moving the patient not to disturb his position or jar him in any way. A blanket or coat most carefully introduced under the body and fastened to poles laid on the ground on either side of him would form an emergency stretcher.'

Thus the oracle.

'Now Hennessy, show how you'd lift a man who'd fractured his spine. What would you have to be careful about?'

'Faith! an' not to move him, Sorr!'

Vaguely struggling to ignore the laughter. 'That's right,' said the Corporal, 'you tumble to it. Now show us what you've got to do.'

'Why,' pursued the big Irishman, 'I'd get two poles to be shure, lay thim down besoid him loike,—and—and—an'—get fure men to lift the poles!'

As the whole class seemed satisfied with this perhaps the point had been made.

'Gangrene,' suggested the Referee.

The Corporal thought he knew something about gangrene. One of the men in Hospital

had been kicked in the face by a horse, and the Major, apropos of these dressings, had explained something about asepsis. He launched out without the book.

'Yes—gangrene,' he remarked, 'that's bad. You mustn't let gangrene happen, you know, it means amputations. If gangrene sets in with Jackson we may have to cut his head off to save his life.'

The roar of laughter which greeted this, reduced him, furiously red, to the book again. He was utterly at sea, and began to think the men had had enough instruction for one afternoon. The thing for them to do now was to get back to Hospital and see if the chaps there wanted anything.

Suddenly one of the Corps remembered a message from the 18th. Would the Corporal go over to their lines and have a look at the cook? He'd gone sick but the Quartermaster's compliments and he was not on any account to be fetched up to Hospital, but to be bucked up to get on with his work for the evening mess.

Liston's gravity could stand no more.

He strolled away with the misgiving that the least he could have done, a guest in the lines of the 31st C.F.A., would have been to save that class from itself. He had no warrant of course—. It was inimitably funny but it gave him a new idea. There should be a First Aid course at Finlay, when

the Hospital was built. These fellows were only prairie fellows; how in the name of thunder could they be drilled into ambulance work in ten or twelve days of annual training? When Heatherstone half severed his foot with the cutter bar of his mower, he nearly bled to death for want of a bandage before Gould found him beside the trail. . . .

It was drawing on towards the hotter evening at the close of the long hot day before the columns began to march back into camp. The men were grimed with sweat and the horses wet as though they had forded rivers. For an hour or more the immense camp was active as a colony of ants. The men, half-clad themselves, led or rode long files of horses from whom the saddles had been quickly stripped, to the brimming troughs just as soon as a vigorous grooming down with hay had cooled them off a bit, and every bath-house beside these splashing troughs had its grateful occupant. Bugle calls resounded from every quarter, and away over the rise where the foot regiments had their lines, came the skirl of the pipes whose evening parade rejoiced every officer's mess on the ground.

Major Grant, too, had done yeoman service by the look of him. His collar was open, and his hair dank and plastered to his streaming face as he cantered in and dismounted. Sam was ready for him, and so

was the tent. An hour later he reclined like a happy Sultan among his cushions, white shirted and fresh, talking to Liston of the target practice.

He had turned a thing or two over in his mind that afternoon, and was determined not to talk 'shop.' The medical men in camp might not see things eye to eye with Cummings exactly, and though Liston was practically a guest in his, Grant's lines, it did not follow he stood sponsor for his doings.

Liston divined his attitude exactly. The gorgeousness of the motor car outside was enough to account for it. This was a man with a moneyed practice in a 'booming' Western city. Perhaps he despised begging in itself; perhaps he considered it quixotic and gratuitous. George preferred the topic of target practice, himself, and accepted an invitation to form one of a night party in imaginary trenches.

An orderly brought his heels together, without.

'That's for you,' remarked the Major, 'they've sent over from the 18th,' and he reached for his Corporal's report.

CHAPTER VIII

THE THRASHERS

ANSELL CARTER's quarter lay in the heart of a very attractive prairie region. From the wooded height above the coulée which threaded it, the immense undulations of a vast rolling country hitherto consecrated to the red-skinned nomads (whose spear heads constantly turned up by the plough like the weapons of palaeolithic man, marked the last native battle grounds), fell away in every direction to the level of an infinitely distant horizon upon whose faint rim rested, north, south, east and west, the blue vault of heaven. Seen thus in bird's-eye view the gentle rise and fall of a thousand mild and gracious hills melted away through all the soft gradations of the prairie hues, past the clear confines of the varied middle distances, to the diaphanous suggestions of those further and further in the amethystine beyond, just as though the whole country had been the water-moulded bed of some long vanished ocean. Only the deep coulées remained with the runways in the hills that gave

upon them, and away to the north a dropping down of the watershed to an illimitable plain, to indicate how that primeval sea had drained away and left a land high and dry and smiling under the sun 'across which Adam might have walked straight from Genesis' or Noah after the Flood; patches of prairie brush or woodland were flung like shadows over the northern slopes of the hills; here and there an unsuspected water-course threading its way athwart some wide flat valley turned the whole tract into an immense meadow of fragrant wild hay; and at intervals among the softly rising and falling contours in the foreground a shining round sheet of water was set amid the emerald of sedges or the pearl of flaunting white irises.

There is something so singularly lovely about a virgin land like this that the freshness of it may even transcend the mellow interest of the ancient regions of the world hallowed by the traditions of the oldest histories.

Here is a land so vast, so new, so hopeful for the future she will still be

Dreaming of men who will bless me, of women
esteeming me good,
Of children born in my borders, of radiant motherhood,
long before their numbers or their labours
complete her vision
Of cities leaping to stature, of fame like a flag unfurled,

As I pour the tide of my riches in the eager lap of the world.

As yet the only denizens of the more recently opened prairies are those settlers who, pouring through Winnipeg in a strong full tide rising higher and higher year by year, are yet dissipated when they reach such a region as this like drops of far flung spray. Ansell Carter was some thirty miles north of the railway line, and at the date when he took up his homestead, the 'breaking' of only three other men was visible from its highest point. The sweet little prairie bird, whose one or two notes of prairie music recalled in absence have a power even beyond that of the coyote's mournful howl to conjure up the very spirit of the country, had things still much to himself.

The whole day on the prairie partakes of the spirit of morning. The scene of the human drama yet to be played out there, as it has been played out on the stage of the old world, yet awaits the players, but the broad land is smiling for very joy to know that the coming men are yet so vigorous, that the world is yet so young, that so much awaits them there to be done so well worth the doing, and that the future for which they stand may yet hold new empires, inspire new peoples, and build new worlds atop of the old.

If it is true that there is a tendency in

modern writing to make of nature herself, however, and of her vast elemental moods the real protagonist instead of man—as Robert Hitchens has foreshadowed with the desert, Joseph Conrad with the sea, and Eden Phillpots with an English moor,—the last, the newest prairies of the Canadian North-West should lend themselves superbly to such treatment, and, like some vast landscape without a single human figure in it, strike a deeper chord in the harmony of things than may announce man's entry on the ageless scene.

The work of Robert Service the Poet of the Yukon is pitiless as nature 'where the north wind swoops from the brooding pole,' virile her conquerors themselves, rough, titanic, as monstrous and glorious. Elizabeth Robins writes equally strongly, equally manfully, but there is more of the mystery of the Arctic night about her work, a perception of the nerve tissue in the iron muscles of men, and the following of loving women's thoughts. It carries woman's compassion for the defeated, deification of that which lies beyond failure, up into the very land where the law of the Yukon holds sway. And yet both these writers are concerned less with the conquerors of the wild than with that glorious wild itself. Why, then, has no one yet written of the prairie also for its own sake?

There is, however, no reason why a score of the strange Slavonic and other tongues

introduced into the West by the tide of immigration should not survive, fostered by the establishment of their own Churches, presses and schools, and blossom one day into such a literature. The educational authorities of the various Provinces look on the acquisition of English by all these peoples—French, German, Polish, Hungarian, Icelandic, Ruthenian, Russian and Indian—as part of Canada's great assimilative process, although it may well be that in agriculture, in the development of the great prairies of the West, in unity of interests, effort, and experience, lies the more immediate solution of the problem how to weld its new populations into one great people, of whom will be born a literature worthy of their mingled traditions and the great New Land.

And then neither the glory of the mountains whose awesomeness 'bludgeons you dumb,' nor the lovelinesses of the weeping Archipelago on the Pacific coast, of purple islands wreathed about by every floating form of mist and cloud born of littoral ranges, and warm ocean currents, glaciers, snow peaks, and the cascades of early summer, will effectually challenge the charm of the illimitable prairies.

Ansell Carter, indeed, with the passions which swayed him, makes but a puny figure against the setting of his homestead.

He had been very well pleased with his

land, and until he began to exhaust the soil, the crops he raised upon it escaped the vicissitudes attending his neighbour's experiments in the same direction. He was wont to tell how one day digging a well behind his stables he was fooled for a moment as many another homesteader in these parts had been by imagining he had discovered gold. His spade came up running with it, and his boots were caked with mud also brilliantly gilded. But a moment's examination showed the effect to be due solely to oxidised mica. He had straightened his back and glanced with no sense of disappointment over his fields instead.

He had put in a few seasons' strenuous work on the prairie and was considering the purchase of an adjoining quarter to his own when Sandra Dunn had been suddenly plucked out of the calculations which turned so largely about her.

Neither she nor George Liston had any reason to suppose the man any more vindictive under ordinary circumstances, or inclined to retaliate brutally where he had a grudge or a grievance, than another of his type, but the instincts he had so offended in the girl would not let her hope that in this case Ansell meant to take things lying down a moment longer than it suited him.

That it had suited him thus far increased her apprehension. Something besides mere

press of farm work through the summer must account for it. Carter might not be capable of plotting great or deliberate things and of nursing careful plans, but as time went on, and the Finlay Hospital crept nearer and nearer to accomplishment, rousing a certain amount of jealousy in the other hamlets up and down the line, and for ever the same inevitable criticism of Liston, there was much harm, she knew, the least ingenious enemy could compass for him and it. Ansell's bearing at the picnic had shown that he, at least, would be at no pains to disarm suspicion or prejudice.

Ansell's passion, however, had so grown upon him, as an obsession may when life, although hard, is yet monotonous and solitary enough to offer no sort of distraction, that he could afford to turn over every aspect of his worsting in his mind, to determine how yet to get the best of it.

He could have got his own back on George Liston at any time, in any way, but that any overt act of hostility on his part towards the other would have helped him no whit with Sandra. It was not sufficient for the man to be revenged on the young doctor if thereby the girl were to be placed further from his reach than ever.

It was this difficulty had held his hand so long.

Only after the picnic at Louis Lake when

Ansell in common with everyone else, found himself in possession of Liston's hopes and schemes and calculations for the Finlay Hospital, did an idea occur to him which seemed likely to resolve it. If by any means it could be so worked that Sandra must come to him of her own accord, his double object were thereby accomplished without risk of losing the greater for the smaller.

It was plain as a pikestaff that George Liston would sooner or later be 'right up against it' for money; that his project would fail if funds were not forthcoming at a crisis. And thinking the thing over, Ansell calculated that Sandra must either care so much for the fellow that she would obtain money for him at any cost, or that by that time she would have decided it were better to be the first thing a man thought about than the last.

After that he was content to wait awhile for time and the growing difficulties of the enterprise at Finlay to do their part. And then came opportunity.

He had never been near Gopher Creek all the summer, and now he determined to go, quite naturally, and to have as much to say to Sandra Dunn as might be necessary.

His grain was cut and thrashed, and the outfit was pulling out, bound in the course of time for that homestead among others in the circuit, when a man deserted whom the owner said would be pretty hard to replace.

He was a lithe little Italian who had—according to a verifiable account enough—tramped it from the workings at Panama to Dawson City, and lingered no longer in any place than might furnish him with the wherewithal to see still more of the world. Topham had taken him on for the thrashing season, but Luigi decided to 'hit the pike' again half-way through. His 'So long, Boys,' was as casual as any Westerner's, and he went off, tramping it to Finlay after but the shortest of interviews with the boss. Whereupon Carter loaned his horses for their keep to a neighbour, and decided to put in some time with the gang in his stead.

In the course of about a week the thrashers were at Redpath's, and as chance would have it, Ansell came upon Sandra there.

The Redpath household consisted of Redpath himself, an honest hardworking man without a thought not bounded by his home, his delicate, refined little wife and baby, and two other children, girls of thirteen and eleven. What Annie and Dora did not know about prairie housework was not worth knowing. Their mother to whom the children's handiness about the shack was at once a pride and a grief, had worked herself into the frightfully precarious state of health which left her, after this last trial, scarcely fit to look after an unexpected baby. It was rarely, indeed, that she ever spoke

sharply to either for some childish piece of neglect or carelessness which fretted her housewifely soul, (the more that she could do next to nothing herself), and only then with an acute sense of the injustice of expecting half as much from children. Annie mothered her mother with extraordinary old-fashioned solicitude, and was altogether a weird little person, all angles, red elbows, pigtails, and very skimpy skirts. Dora, the younger, was charmingly pretty. She never seemed to be doing much else than wringing out, ineffectually, very tepid and very greasy rags in the dish-water, while Annie bustled her along amid a clatter of pails and plates.

Whenever the Schoolhouse over at Ditton, a couple of miles away, boasted of a teacher, Mrs Redpath took good care that the little girls should get some schooling, and daily they drove backwards and forwards with the old pony in the buckboard. It sometimes happened, however, that the school was closed for a season, and Annie's and Dora's studies remained so much in abeyance it might be wondered if they had ever begun. The children knew how to shoulder responsibility and care, and all about the rise and fall week by week in the buying price of some things and the selling price of others, but they knew little else. The only games they had were the games they played with each other or the dogs, and their only toys were puppies

and kittens until the baby came, and that took the place of a doll.

Mrs Redpath was fortunate in having good neighbours. There was Mrs Lorrie, a buxom young woman with a couple of buxom babies. She generally gave her sick friend a day at the washtub early in the week and brought the babies with her, when the importance of Annie and Dora as the little bosses of their mother's kitchen sank to relative insignificance, and the place became a pandemonium of tubs and buckets, full of slops and steam, the smell of wet clothes, uncleared meals, and children.

There was Mrs Park from the coulée, a laughing chattering girl from the north of Ireland, with a brogue and a fund of good humour which would have made her the Mark Tapley of a district far less well-favoured than the Finlay prairies. She considered it an immense score off her husband that she had no children, and trudged about the trails when there was no chance of the ox-waggon with so keen an appreciation of their beauties under all and every circumstance, from fire to blizzard, that she never failed to get an astounding amount of interest and zest out of life, and to proclaim the fact wherever she went.

Then, again, only a mile and a half away was Gopher Creek and the Dunns. Whoever else had a criticism for Sandra's mother, born

of nothing but prairie gossip, Mrs Redpath esteemed her for what she was.

When the thrashers were known to have pulled in at Redpath's there was a great gathering of the clans among the womenfolk to see Mrs Redpath through.

Mrs Park and Mrs Lorrie, Mrs Dunn and her daughter made short work of a couple of meals or so for fourteen men who slept in their own caboose. The united resources in the crockery and cutlery line of four households about did for that part of the business, while a muster of contributed pies and cakes and bread solved all the rest of the problem, save the stew itself, the serving, and the clearing away.

The thrashers in Western Canada, like Christmas elsewhere, come but once a year ; and the pleasure of seeing them off at least equals the nuisance of having them arrive. In the meantime the very sun itself would stand still if it depended on the farmer's wife, then, to keep it going.

How the thrashing gang—fourteen of them—with Redpath himself and two hired men in addition, ever got into that little log and sod kitchen and settled down round the table to such trencher drill as is not seen elsewhere in the world or under other circumstances, was prairie feat enough.

Sandra had been in her element helping the children to the wherewithal, in the shape

of broken pots and pans, to make mud-pies outside, while she turned out Mrs Redpath's kitchen cupboard, exhausting its resources in plates, knives and forks and spoons, and laid the table for the thrashers' dinner.

It was only when the men came trooping in, and she saw Ansell Carter unexpectedly among them, the girl was taken aback. She had not known he was putting in time with this outfit. But she soon recovered herself, and went on with her work, oblivious of his presence. It was not likely he would have any more to say to her than she to him, or if he had—without Nancy Johnson by—that he would find an opportunity to say it. She had not seen him since the day of the picnic at Louise Lake. She kept herself assiduously busy now, and never let him catch her eye.

Ansell Carter, however, was a man less easily baulked once he had set his heart upon a thing, than Dr Liston knew.

The talk down his end of the table was pretty brisk, and presently something was struck out of it about the Finlay Hospital. One of the thrashers, Jake Ling, remarked that so far as those tickets went there ought to be a hundred and seventy dollars right there at that board. 'If we all was to subscribe,' and a man or two laughed.

The owner of the outfit, Topham, reckoned with thrashing at four cents a bushel, with

six teamsters to pay, the season wouldn't leave him many dollars to spare, anyway.

The challenge passed to Redpath whose heavy crops had already called forth approving comment.

'Not with fourteen of you eating me out over Sunday,' he hedged—(he had long ago bought tickets for his wife and children)—'and a break down on Monday! What d'ye take me for? A wheat king?'

'Say, Miss Dunn,' enquired Ling as she reached for his plate, and, grabbing knife and fork he twisted round to hand it to her, 'what's the Doc's notion anyway? There's one or two of us fellers was thinkin' we would like to hear a bit more about it.'

Sandra coloured violently that he should refer to her. Anyone could tell about George's Insurance plan. She was too loyal however, to fight shy of the question altogether.

'He wants to sell three hundred \$10 tickets a year,' she said, 'to run the hospital. It isn't much for what you'd get in return.'

'Lands sakes! I'm not likely to be sick am I?' exclaimed Jake, with a comical pretence at fright,—'here, somebody! look at my tongue! I 'ain't never bin sick in my life.'

'Gee! but I'd giv ten dollars to be sure I never would be sick,' observed one of the others, 'there's that way of looking at it too.'

'Them what pays and don't need to get nuthin' for it, pays for them what gets more than their share. And them what gets more than their share is likely to be a good bit sicker than what ten dollars would pay for three or four times over. It's a downright good notion, boys. It's what runs the railroad camp hospitals and them in the mining camps in B.C. I knows. I subscribed all the time I was in them gangs before I got quit of the mount'ns. If the Doc. can't work it here among the farmers on the prairie, it won't be no fault of his.'

And old Atkinson, Topham's engineer, delivered himself of a more authoritative pronouncement than it had been any part of Carter's design to elicit. It was of no immediate moment to him, however, which way the trend of comment went.

'You don't get no ten dollars out of me,' said another, 'I ain't likely to be sick no more than Jake and I ain't likely to catch myself paying for them what is. They can pay for themselves quite as well or quite as ill as I can.'

The truth of this appealed to the dollar wise, if its unblushing, unconscious, selfishness did not. No one cared to raise the ethical point, and the subject might have dropped as carelessly as it had been raised but for Carter who looked up at Sandra handing tea over a fellow's shoulder, and

told her two men out Rutherford's way had confided twenty dollars to him for the hospital. Should he give them to her or to the Doctor?

To neither. To Mackay at the Bank in Finlay.

He would not be going to Finlay for goodness knew how long.

'Very well,' she said to end it, 'you can leave the money here.'

Redpath made an opportune diversion. He asked if there was any truth in the rumour that Ansell was intending to sell out.

'They were saying so, last winter.'

'Well, I had thought of it,' returned the other, 'but it isn't as though I couldn't wait for my price. If it's true there's a railroad coming through to the north of here it's worth while waiting some.'

Two or three of the thrashermen opined there would be big changes throughout the country as soon as the new municipality got down to work, and it might be worth any man's while to hang on, who knew anything at all about cattle, until herd law was done away with. Another few seasons would see the Finlay district all converted into ranching country. The talk veered round to this tack and became animated.

The homesteader had been accustomed to lock the door of his prairie shanty behind him after the summer's work and the

harvest were over, and go off to look after his interests elsewhere, only reappearing with the break-up of winter and the spring.

This year, he said, he intended to stay on the homestead, and adduced one or two so plausible reasons in view of this probable agrarian revolution, that Sandra told herself she was a fool to distrust them. But her heart sank as serving round the table there, so much news came to her willy nilly of a man she had never ceased instinctively, to fear. She fired up with indignation every time someone's sneer came to her as to what for George Liston might have undertaken the enterprise at Finlay, and half suspected Jake Ling had been 'getting at' her with his question. Few could give the doctor credit for disinterestedness.

In a young country where the struggle to make and maintain a footing is for each individual man a matter of the survival of the one with the keenest eye to the main chance, it is inevitable that altruism in any shape or form should be open to misunderstanding and mistrust. George Liston would never have thought of himself as an altruist (much less as a benefactor) even had he no personal stake in the Hospital as a Doctor. As soon as he realised there was all this in the air to contend with—or to

endure until time worked its own revolutions—he understood it and it troubled him no whit.

But Sandra was filled with uneasiness to learn that Carter would not presently be going away as usual. If she had hated him before for his clumsy love-making she hated him more now for the part he had likely been playing since the picnic at the Lake in setting a dozen of those lies about the country which—given half an hour's start on the prairie as elsewhere—the correcting truth will never catch up. Liston was credited with commission-making over every stick and stone of the Hospital, and many wondered what deals he had put through in Edmonton under cover of that begging stunt.

When the men got up from the table and were jostling their way out, after the evening meal, Carter lingered and managed to corner Sandra a moment on the plea of giving her the bills.

'Say!' he remonstrated rather sheepishly, 'you needn't be in such a tear. I ain't going to bite you. If you'd just give a feller a chance to say a word—'

'I haven't anything to say to you, Ansell,' she returned, unwillingly. 'I don't mean as I bear you any ill will. But you'd better leave me be.'

She suffered the encounter only for the

sake of those bills, and held out her hand for them.

But the man meant to make the feint serve as long as it might.

'I never meant no harm to you, Sandra,' he said, turning over the contents of a pocket-book. 'There wasn't anything for you to be so hard about, and how was I to know you was on with another guy? And when a feller's half-canned, he isn't quite the master of himself he should be.—No! now don't you be running off quite so quick,' as, with a flash of indignation she fathomed his trick and would have escaped him, 'I've got something to say to you, straight!'

A compelling touch on her arm held the girl where she was, for despite her sense of affront, Sandra was afraid, for the sake of the man she loved, to refuse to hear what this might be. Her heaving breast and her angry eyes fired him to some rough pleading.

'It's this,' he said stepping so close to her she could withdraw no further, and dropping his voice to a tone of almost hoarse urgency, 'I'm sorry, Sandra. If it wasn't for knowing I hadn't used you quite as I should, I'd ha' got my own back on that Doctor feller long before this. Don't you make no mistake. But what I said to you I meant, and I mean it still. And you know what that is. There ain't no girl I ever saw I want as I want you —No! you haven't no call to be frightened

of me, and I'm going to have my say out.' He caught the arm with which she would have thrust her way past him, and held her rigidly to the ordeal. 'I'd ha' got my own back on George Liston, if it hadn't been for you, and just to show you, Sandra, that I'm in dead earnest, I ain't going to do nothing to him. I've been thinking about the best way of this for a long time, and when I saw you up here dinner time, I made up my mind to put it to you to-night. The day you throw that feller over for me I'll give a thousand dollars to the Hospital. A thousand dollars would mean all the difference to him at a pinch, I'll lay, and he cares a lot more about the Hospital nor ever he cares about you——'

She tore her arm from his grasp with a cry.

'You haven't no right to say that! How dare you talk to me so, Ansell Carter? It isn't true.'

'All of us fellers can see it though,' he pursued following up his advantage and still effectively barring her escape, 'what's he keeping you hanging about for all this time, else? When you might have been married to me, Sandra, these two years? Now I mean what I say and you're going to have cause to remember it. That's all. You watch it! The day you asks me for that thousand dollars in the way I mean you to ask, it's yours.'

The clatter Mrs Lorrie made clearing the dishes almost drowned her retort for the girl dreaded a scene with this man, and her voice was low as his own.

'He said you was a coward,' she threw at him, on the verge of outraged tears, 'and he's never given two straws for anything you might do, but I have, and I see what you've got in your mind. It's a coward's game, indeed, to come to me with this talk of dollars, and trying to make me believe as he don't care—'

He interrupted her.

'Don't you fly off the handle like that, but listen to sense. There isn't anything I've thought of all these months past but you, and I defy anyone to say as much as that for him.'

He flung on his cap, and thinking better of the untimely impulse which prompted him to catch her in his arms, helped her to self-mastery by some signs of having had his say.

'I love you, Sandra, you know that, and I swear before God I'd make you as good a husband as ever woman had yet! I may be a bit rough but you'd find me putty in your hands—just to do as you liked with best. I told you I hadn't had my turn yet with that other feller and now you know for why. He cares for that Hospital a sight more than he cares for you and if you don't find it out before, you'll find it out the day

you has to buy the success for him he won't get without my thousand dollars. That's good enough for me—'

She threw up her disengaged arm across her face to fend off the kiss his close lips threatened.

'You dare, Ansell!' she cried, straining from him, 'you dare! What if I was to tell him what you say?'

He laughed, but drew back.

'Why, I could change my mind any time I wanted to. Put him wise if you think that would help things any. It's for you to choose, Sandra.'

But he released her arm, no more anxious than the girl herself to attract the attention of others, and Sandra broke away instantly.

Their brief colloquy had scarcely lasted three minutes. It served, perhaps, no purpose to detain her longer just then, so he threw a doubtful glance after her, and turning to the door, passed out into the night.

Sandra brushed past her mother and Mrs Lorrie, busy washing up the plates and dishes, ran into an outhouse beyond the kitchen and burst into tears.

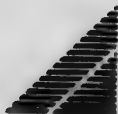
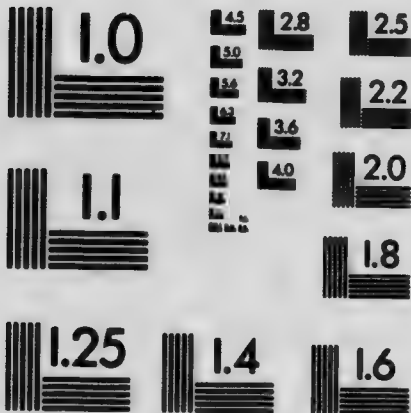
She felt like a flower that had been crushed in a hot hand, and is no longer fit to wear. She wilted in the proximity of Ansell's passion.

It was cool and dark in the outhouse all among Mrs Redpath's milking pails, but it



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took less time than her shaken nerves required to recover themselves, for Sandra, (frightened for the consequences) to jump through this welter of doubt and danger and bribery to the conclusion that whatever happened she must keep Ansell's base counsel to herself!

CHAPTER IX

A THREAD IN THE WEAVING

THE last Committee meeting they held at Finlay prior to the freeze-up, was a long and stormy one.

No less important a decision, indeed, had to be reached than as to whether the building of the Hospital should begin at once—and already the ground was so hard the digging of the cellar would be a regular job—or whether the whole thing should stand over till the spring.

Again, if they decided to build now, should any of the tenders for the contract be accepted, or should the architect's specifications go largely by the board and the work be put through piecemeal as funds might permit, day by day as the weather might permit, or by local labour, as far as local labour might go? The debate began about six, as usual, in the little office behind the hardware store, and it was one of the darkest of prairie nights before the decision of which everyone fought shy and at which none had

much intention of arriving, somehow got itself made. Then no one seemed to know who had pressed, or who had given in, except the Chairman; and he resigned. The thing presented so many knotty points. Every defect of every house and shanty in the place from the elevator down to Mr Aldersey's log stable (which had blown over) was cited by way of warning as to what should not be done, and whose opinion should not be taken. The more peaceful members of the Committee waited until the personalities to which all this gave rise between the belligerents, subsided, or were ruled out by Mr Rogers' swinging pencil case. Yet it was only when the architectural experiments of Finlay were exhausted as a point of departure for the discussion, that an impasse of ideas was revealed on the constructive side.

A good deal had happened since the Doctor had come back from camp in the summer, bringing a few hundreds of dollars.

The men down there at Emsdale had subscribed willingly enough, but many regiments found it easier to have their contributions stopped out of pay, rather than taken up on the spot. As that pay itself did not come to hand for a month or two after the break up of camp there was not much to show for the three or four days Liston had held himself to the task, and meantime there

had been room for leakage of good intentions. Colonel Cummings did not fail to forward a cheque rather better even than his word, however, and Major Benoit and the 16th Battery were not far behind. Edmonton had responded also, to the newspaper appeals, sufficiently so far to swell the total in the Bank that the Committee felt themselves justified in approaching the Canadian Order.

After a due filling in of forms, forwarding of information and estimating of the local population (they counted the last baby) word presently came back from Ottawa that the \$2,000 for which it had been suggested they should petition the Youville Fund in the reasonable hope of getting \$1,500 would be granted in full, and every man on the Board wanted to kick himself for not asking more.

The hamlet was sufficiently delighted but it was perhaps quite as much the democratic independent spirit of the age, (nowhere more exemplified than in the springing prairie towns of the West), as his official position on the Board which left the sole acknowledgments to Liston. He might have returned no more than a formal receipt. As it was, he wrote warmly to the Executive and to the Lady Superintendent of the Order. If the letter represented more than the young Doctor's own faith and bull-dog tenacity of purpose there was little doubt about the future before the undertaking.

But the satisfaction of seeing clearly for a foot or so in front of his nose with regard to the actual building only deepened the sense of responsibility in a man the halo of whose quietly nursed enthusiasms never dimmed the clearness of his vision. This sense grew upon him with every contribution entered up in Mackay's ledgers and with every resolution entered on the minute book. It was the weightiest thing they had done yet, at Finlay, to ask for this money and face the expectations naturally based upon the granting of it. This slice of mighty work settled the question as to whether there was to be such a thing as a Hospital at all, or not, but it doubled the anxiety as to whether the upkeep of it afterwards would not prove too much for them. He felt now about the Order's assistance as he had felt about the Premier's kindly gift; then gave up the more immediate doubt on the reflection that if you trump at all you've got to trump high!

He was genuinely elated.

This money would be spent in the place, since the Hospital was to be put up on the piece work plan, and would do much towards keeping Finlay alive through the winter. There had been seasons when it looked as though the little hamlet would go under, as others like it had nearly done, after a harvest bringing in but small returns.

It would be fine no doubt to pull off the first half of the business—the actual building of the Hospital—but the problem of maintenance received little encouragement from the result of the year's harvest. Maintenance, however, was the one thing which alone could justify all the interest he had endeavoured to rouse for the place outside, and upon it depended a certain amount of prestige he felt bound to consider more than he had ever considered his own, the prestige indeed of the Canadian Order.

Even as he sat with his fingers as it were on the erratic pulse of the Committee, smoking like the rest of them, one knee thrown over the arm of his chair, George watched his project shrink, if the worst came to the worst, from the piece of work it struck him as so eminently worth while doing, (he thought of it at its best in no more romantic terms than these), to the proportions of a hoax or failure!

Again the justification maintenance and success with the Hospital would supremely mean to him, would be the justification of the many sacrifices he had imposed on Sandra. He had seen little or nothing of Sandra all the summer; at the present moment he had hardly a cent towards the home he had promised her.

The year the colony of which Finlay was the remnant came into the country, the crops

had been all and more the most enthusiastic 'publicity agents' for that district had declared them to be, and as emigration pictures represent them. Had the newly settled colonists been able to get enough acreage under cultivation they might indeed have found their wheaten El Dorado. The flax, costliest yet most delicate crop, did well that year. But afterwards had set in a sort of cycle of decline, watching which made Gould, the Weed Inspector, declare that presently it would be decided this was a ranching or mixed farming rather than grain raising country. In the interest of the experiment however few paid much attention to such prognostications. Everyone went in for wheat, and everyone was destined to learn the lesson. 'Faith, hope and charity,' as a railway magnate himself owned to Liston that summer in Edmonton, 'the greatest of these in western Canada, is hope.' The doctor himself had caught the infection of the hope that there is in a new land, and a riot of possibilities, and he also, was making an experiment. It was costly for the Hospital that the two should synchronise.

There had come a late spring one year and the wheat on the hilltops was not showing an inch by the first of June. Another year exceptional hail ploughed it under, whole acres of it, mid-way through the summer. A man frozen out this season, was

burnt out the last. The harvest this year was better than it had been the preceding (when no man got top grade for his grain, and at least a third of it went as 'feed,') but a shortage of cars to move the crop on the railroad might again bring the price per bushel down so far that the farmers lost on their mere working expenses. Few harvest hands had come into the district as only one man here and there could risk the expense of hired help. There were times when no money was going at all. Exchange reverted to barter and the stores either went bankrupt or gave credit where they had never given it before.

There was no panic however and no grumbling—only a lot of hardship and shortage it was to everybody's interest to ignore. Everyone remained incurably optimistic and took heart from the analogy of the early days in Manitoba when those who only remained in the country because they had no means to pull out, presently became millionaires. The man who burnt his frozen crop off the face of his wasted acres, set to work again next day to plough under the stubble and make ready for seeding again in the spring. The whole thing was a mere question of time—and of being able to tide over.

It scarcely looked just now like maintenance for a Hospital. Yet having gone so far

they were bound to go further, and George Liston was a man in whom purpose triumphed long after the enthusiasm of immediate hopes had given place to anxieties and disillusionments. He shared the spirit of the pioneers. The agricultural conditions of the district, he felt, were less a handicap than the tacit obligation resting upon men whose living depended on retaining faith in them, to admit no failure. The only ground upon which the Finlay hospital might seek further afield for aid would be the ruin of another harvest, and yet this was the one fact it behoved everyone to deny or hush up unless the village was to go under, and the homesteads to return to prairie.

It would be a cruel anti-climax if—when the Hospital was built and had struggled along a few summer months on the crest of the wave which created it and the contributions in kind of the farmers,—if it had to shut up. At a time when the fierce strain of the work of a Western Canadian summer, capped perhaps, by the disappointment of a harvest brought to naught at the eleventh hour, when a diet exclusively of eggs and pork had succeeded in playing tricks with the magnificent prairie digestion, and even the men fell sick, it would be a hard thing to own failure over the Hospital, and shut it in their faces.

Liston put the thought aside. He had

weighed it long enough, God knew, and the harvest was beyond his calculations! Sufficient for the day must be the evil thereof, and the next job in hand, since they had decided on day labour and local men was to put up a new Chairman. In the meantime every nerve must be strained to meet the responsibilities he had sighted from afar, with all the glow of dreams about them, and save them from assuming the proportions of a waking nightmare.

The thing, undoubtedly, was ageing him, but nobody noticed that.

It was here, of course, that Sandra came in. Sweet as Liston found it to have her notice when he was jaded, and to have her spend on him some of that wealth of solicitude there is in the heart of every woman for the child or the man she loves, he reproached himself at the same time for adding concern of this sort to the long patience circumstances rather than he imposed upon her.

He reproached himself for apparent neglect of her, and for being but a sapless sort of lover, sometimes, when he did manage to get to Gopher Creek.

He drove out there one day to fetch some provisions Mrs Dunn had promised for one of the Alderseys' Church teas, and it could not but strike him that a shadow seemed to have fallen on his sweet Goose Girl.

Of contributions in ready cooked kind to every 'social' got up for this or that object throughout the township few gave more willingly and more generously than Sandra's mother. The Alderseys always knew upon whom to rely for the best of everything at harvest thanksgiving. And as these preparations had a way of falling on days otherwise especially busy, there were times when things hummed at the Creek.

Sandra gave the churn a final turn or two and hooked up the barrel.

Inside, the butter granulated to a nicety, stippled the lid.

'Say, George,' she observed, 'you might help me wash it.'

She knocked out the bung, and a rich jet of buttermilk smooth as ivory, fresh and acrid, sprang out into the big pail set ready. The Doctor caught up a couple of others and went off to haul the water.

'Well now, Sandra, that's real good,' cried her mother, lifting hands from the wash-tub and stripping them of suds like boxing gloves, 'you get right after them pigs with that swill, and leave me to finish. I'll have a few pounds of fresh butter made up ready for George to take with the rest.'

She reached for the kettle to scald hands already half par-boiled. 'And you, Maggie child, get down in the cellar and fetch me up

a pot of jam, and some bran to pack the eggs.'

Liston came back from the well with the water brimming in the pails, and there was a noisy splashing, butter-washing, which almost drowned Mrs Dunn's directions to Bob outside in the garden about making up the 'bokay.' 'Now don't you go cutting them stems too short, and what did I tell you about that minyonet!'

There was a second pail of buttermilk for the pigs, so George carried it down the yard to the stable. It was a glorious day at the end of October; all the foliage along the valley which marked the hidden course of the stream had turned to autumn tints and was now touched by the westering sun with the red-gold light which comes with the sharp chills of the fall. The wooded hill on the far side whence the trail came down a cutting, looked as though spread with the rarest carpet where crimson and madder and brown in rich combinations, sank to purple in the shadows. The air had a keen nip in it and a presage of night frosts. Inside the stable it was warmer. A faint aroma of milk mingled with the exhalations of a manure-choked alleyway; and there was the unmistakeable smell of pigs in the corner. The light was obscure, and George groped for a moment as he entered. Sandra, knowing he would come, had waited for

him, but now seemed all devotion to the pigs. Nothing would do but that he should clamber over into that mire and drive back the grunting stampeding porkers, brandishing a stick, while she with her breast against the topmost pole leaned, laughing, over the high pen, and splashed the swill into the trough.

The pigs broke forward then, in a sort of violent échelon formation, and plunged into it forefeet and all, while the One Over for whose indignant snout there was no room, raced madly backwards and forwards in the rear of the greedy line, and did its best to butt or root its way to the front.

The Doctor climbed out again with one of his very rare swear words, and clipped Sandra in his arm.

She turned the line of her cheek to him, still leaning on the pen watching the pigs, but something a little unusual in her silence and in the rather sedulous way she evaded the obvious kiss, gave him concern.

'Anything the matter?' he asked.

She turned her eyes to his then as though he might read the answer in her face, but their expression at once yielded—a way they had when she was tender,—and, as though the matter had been Smiler, which it wasn't, she said the pig was going to be killed.

He laughed.

'You've squandered enough love on those

infernal little pigs to run an orphanage. But say—don't they grow up quickly.'

One of Mrs Dunn's incontrovertible rulings had gone forth, and the porker, guzzling now in a pen to himself, was doomed. Bob had been over to the neighbour's that morning and mixed up his mother's message. Would Mr Babcock come down and help the pig to kill their hired man? A cruel looking tripod already stood in the yard and the cauldron had been trundled into position. Only a year ago, Sandra said, Smiler had been a black roley-poley pudding with an idiotic smile, side face, and clean little hoofs like polished agates—

Her heart was too big, George told her, that was the matter. 'I'm not going to have you in the blues about Smiler the one day I do get a chance to come over. That's hard lines, Sandra.'

'You don't come over,' she retorted, 'unless there's something besides me, now, to bring you,' and a blush burned over her throat and cheek.

'I know, my Sweetheart,' he admitted remorsefully not altogether unprepared for this, 'it must look so to you—I know! Tell me, is there anything I can do, anything I can say to have you pardon it?'—

'Oh,' she broke in, half angry, half pitiful, 'you're getting to look that old, George, and there's nothing I can do to help you. It

makes me feel so useless! If it wasn't so plain you care about the Hospital a lot more than you care about yourself, I should say you care about it more than me, too. It wouldn't matter so much only that they wonder what you're out for—everybody all round. And it makes me that mad when you come here looking like nothing on earth. . . .'

It was the sum of what she found to excuse her tears; it was the wound a dozen criticisms had inflicted on her loyalty and tender faith.

'Why, Sandra darling,' the man remonstrated kissing her, 'you mustn't talk like this! I can't have it.—You know you are just all the world to me,' and striving to reassure as the lover in him, thoroughly aroused, might best dictate, George drew her head to his shoulder, and laid a very concerned and earnest face upon hers. He murmured a thousand loving things, but twice she resisted when he would have had a fairer and squarer look at her.

Something, indeed, ailed Sandra. She was, if anything, a trifle restive under his attempts to comfort her, for little of what she had said revealed the real root of her trouble.

Hitherto it was true, she could be and often was, as vexed with Liston for considering everyone and everything before himself, as Mrs Dunn, who frequently waxed

voluble with common sense on the subject. But unlike her mother, the girl had not identified herself with the things which should press most on Liston's mind. She had never been jealous of his work and his pre-occupations; nothing had troubled the serene instinctive assurance of her heart. At least one of the complaints she had just made, had been so long foreign to Sandra's thoughts, so below the level altogether of the trust and the aims of the man who had confided both to her, it was not until Carter told her to 'watch it' she ever charged George with setting more store by the work which absorbed his time, than he did by the girl he meant to marry.

And thinking over that villainous bribe of the man who had persecuted her, Sandra came, presently, to be rather more relieved by it than frightened. It was much to know what was going on in his mind, and to feel that so far as he might be content to leave the upshot to her, he would attempt nothing else against George. The reflection had helped her to see that every aspect of the thing he had put before her was part of the plot which counted for success either on these doubts of hers she had only entertained in consequence of it, or on the love it might prompt to sacrifice.

She had sobbed that night in Mrs Redpath's outhouse like a child, ashamed

and frightened, knowing that were any ill turn of fate to deprive her of the protection of this man, in whose arms it was wholly natural she should be, she must fail like wax before the other since she knew not how to withstand the hot masterfulness of his determination.

The resolve that she had only to forget, and never breathe an indignant word to Liston, lest the harm would come of it she had wondered delayed so long—harm she might not gauge, like this—helped her that night to regain her composure. She had dried her eyes, and finished the washing up.

Carter had not again found an opportunity to speak three words to her alone. The thrashers came, indeed, to Gopher Creek a few days afterwards, but the girl kept sedulously out of his way.

The trouble was not, now, that Sandra really felt any jealousy of Liston's work so much as that she could do nothing to help him.

'You can help me,' he assured her, 'and you do, darling, a thousand times more than I could make you understand. Don't you suppose it's half the battle of life to a man, Sandra, to have won the love of the girl he wants? Come, my darling dear,' he caressed her rebellious hair, 'I can't bear to see you cry! I'd rather you wept buckets full of tears over Smiler, than one over me.'

Her arm tightened gratefully round his

neck, and she certainly made a little effort on the lines of this diversion to cheer up.

'I hate to hear the killing,' she explained, 'they scream so, and there's the blood all around.'

'Can't you stand the sight of blood?'

'Oh, it's not that. But this will be Smiler's and when he's been such a sort of pet—'

'Because you'd make a splendid Nurse. You've got the touch for it, light and gentle, but with an immense suggestion of authority.'

Her hand had crept round to his cheek. She snatched it away and looked at it incredulously.

'My hands!' she exclaimed, 'why they're that big!' and thrust them behind her lest he had been laughing at her.

'No, now don't take it away. Here—put it back again.' Liston replaced it—'they aren't a bit big, Sandra, they're just proportionate. And your nerve's all right—steady as a rock.'

'They'd never learn me,' she doubted, flushing. Somehow the tears started in her eyes again, 'there's nothing I can do, no even to take care of you. They'd never learn me to be a Nurse.'

'Learn you,' he echoed derisively, 'why, you sweet old thing, you'd sail right through. I'm not wanting you to be a Nurse though, Sandra. What makes you think it, eh?' and his lips on hers murmured indistinctly

what else she was to be to him. 'You know that, don't you?'

'I don't know anything,' she said perversely, 'Maggie has forgotten now more than I ever learned.'

'Stuff,' Liston exclaimed, 'you write a better letter than I do anyday.'

His own, professional misgivings came back to him for a moment, and associated with them, the thought of Alma Norway. 'Say,' he asked her after a moment's pause, 'what's put all this into your head, old Sweet-heart? Is it anything I've said, or done?'

But Sandra could not meet his eyes.

That he had, a score of times, expressed hopes and doubts as to whether the Canadian Order would send to Finlay a Nurse like that splendid little creature he had met in Edmonton, when the Hospital should be finished, had plunged the girl into the depths of a vague unformulated trouble as far removed from jealousy as her patience up till now had been removed from it, or from indifference. His remark about her hands revealed something of this to Sandra, and she would have died sooner than have him think her jealous. She was the type of woman who craves to give, where she loves, more than to receive.

Desperately now she envied—a profession.

There would come soon a woman not much older than herself, perhaps, who must play a vital part in this work of his, the work that was costing him and herself so dear,

the work which had involved the indefinite setting aside of their home together. And this Nurse could give it and George in an hour more help than she, for all her long months of waiting. The prairie girl was no idealist, and the dollar-wise suspicions only too generally expressed all round the township as to Liston and this Hospital of his wounded her to the heart in the light of her own knowledge, and made her rebellious.

'No, no, no,' she protested, and disengaged herself from his embrace, it was nothing he had 'done,' 'that way.'

Liston kicked the mud off his boots against one of the uprights of the pen and took hold of her again.

'Let's sit down,' he said.

There was an overturned oatbin in the feed-room at the back of the stable. A hen sitting in a box behind it crooned suspiciously for a moment as the two disturbed her. A white and ginger kitten gambolled sideways across the chaff-strewn floor, and sprang to Sandra's skirts like a sailor into the ratlines.

George put his arm about her waist, and tried to divine the trouble. Sandra had not often been in any mood of reserve with him.

'You've got to tell me,' he said, turning her reluctant face to his, with fingers against her round chin, 'but I believe I can make a guess.'

That the thought of the Nurse who would presently shoulder half his responsibilities and share his work, gave her every sort of natural pang, he could well understand. He

knew this was not jealousy of the Nurse, as a woman, especially as she had not yet turned up.

But Sandra found nothing to say ; she was unable to draw the distinction in so many words, and the answer he got was from her tell-tale blush. Liston kissed her. The only punishment she deserved, and the only reassurance which might disabuse her mind of the fear that he would think her jealous, was the kind smile that wound up his quizzical affectionate scrutiny.

'I used to feel that silly,' she confessed, 'when you came here first, that shy of you, and I should be again if ever you wanted anything clever of me, George.'

The kitten had swarmed up between them, and was now poking its little wet nose into his face. Liston put up a hand and caught hold of it, but it clung with all its claws.

'Sandra,' he said, pausing, 'if ever it should happen someone had to cut off their right hand for me, I believe you would do that. But I should call it something else than "clever."'

She dislodged the tenacious little creature, and placed her two arms round his neck.

'Be sure I would,' she promised him with a glad change of manner, 'no one else would do as much as that, perhaps, and no one else would have the right.'

'My darling,' he emphasised it, 'know this ; whatever happens it is upon you, you first and you last, I should rely not only in

any crisis at Finlay, but in any trouble at all. No one else can or will be to me, under any circumstances, what you are !'

She searched his face.

Liston cared everything, she knew, for success with this work of his and nothing for recognition, but that he might sacrifice the 'red passions' of life, his or hers, to one of its 'white passions' escaped her simple definitions. The Hospital project—to the man an everyday affair, touched to great issues only because of the prairie circumstances—was becoming a goal to gain which he would count no cost. Sandra could understand this, perhaps, helped by her love, and it held no such trouble for her as the thought that another woman might give more to it than she.

Was there any task, indeed, among the many difficulties lying ahead to which this girl, despite all her shyness and self-diffidence, would not force herself to help him if needs be ?

His pale face warmed with the certainty. If a Nurse turned up her nose—as that fellow had said at the Convention—and declined to work at Finlay under all the disadvantages of a hard-won prairie beginning, he might indeed have to fall back on Sandra, ordeal as this would be to her, until things got into better shape. There were few spare hands in the community, and there was no telling how and when she might not be the only one to stop a critical gap.

'Never think I'd have you anything but what you are,' he said, straining her confidently to him, 'just the sweetest, dearest darling in the world to me. Whoever may come along to run things at the Hospital it isn't likely there won't be times and squeaks when if my girl won't help me no one can!'

Suddenly all thought of the Nurse was blotted from Sandra's mind by the remembrance of Carter's dollars. The moment she had given that glad promise to cut off her hand—even as he spoke—a fear gripped her so that her heart seemed to poise, sickeningly, on a suspended beat.

'I should rely upon you, sweetheart, if the bottom of the world fell out.'

She put up a hand quickly, turned her head so that he might not see her face.

'Don't,' she bade him, 'talk like that! What should make you say such a thing?'

Liston was too weary of them himself to bother Sandra with the pros and cons of the financial situation. This girl was more to him than a Home full of trained Nurses and that was all need matter to either of them just then.

He yielded to her embrace and closed contented eyes.

'That I should rely on you if the bottom of the world fell out—?' her heart leapt as though something goaded it over a dead point—'Oh, my dear! because I shouldn't be a bit surprised if it did.'

CHAPTER X

THE LADY SUPERINTENDENT

ALL through that winter—and it was about a year now since Dr Liston had first broached the idea of the Hospital—anyone approaching Finlay from the north, south, east, or west could see it going up on the little rise opposite the elevator. At the beginning, in December, a few uprights sketched out a new object on the skyline, and it was odd from the look of those first joists and beams, and of the rough dug cellar underneath them, how small a building it promised to be. But later when the walls were finished and the roof laid on and the plasterers had all their work cut out to keep the fires going and the plaster soft, the clear ample rooms looked immense. The work went on through January and February into March, despite a temperature which in 'snaps' froze all the metal tools and rendered them brittle as glass. Breathing on a little fret saw one day, to thaw it out, Billy Cummings put the thing too close to his mouth. His lips froze to the steel and skin came off with the saw. But long before the snow went in the spring the plasterers and carpenters had finished.

The key was turned in the lock of a beautiful clean empty box, the purity and whiteness of whose walls and new-laid floors was only matched by the flawless snow without. And so it was left awhile, until it might be feasible to fix the tanks and gutters, finished as far as superficial observation went, but as the Committee began to discover, with everything yet to be done.

The funds gave out within a couple of hundred dollars of this point. *Everything* still remained to be done! If George Liston's head spun at the prospect he kept it very well.

One Tuesday in March two women came to his little office in Finlay and asked if they might expect accommodation in the Hospital by June. Before the week was out he had calmly booked seven cases there for the early summer, and thrown care to the winds with the outgoing mail. Beds and blinds, range, and pots and pans, blankets, crockery and a full dispensary—these things, and hundreds more, the Hospital must have if they never got paid for till the crack of doom.

A time had arrived when it seemed necessary to work backwards from the end rather than steadily forward. The gap in the progress would prepare the Hospital, in a hand-to-mouth sort of way, for the immediate housing of cases it were a pity to leave out on the homesteads if there were any other place to take them, while all such mid-way essentials such as drains and baths,

furnace, theatre furniture, and light were left for time and chance to provide.

The question as to whether such patients as Liston had under his care the day the beds were put up, would be better off in the Hospital—such as it was then—or left in their shacks, was one only to be determined by the individual circumstances. If a Nurse could be got to take charge there, at this stage of disadvantage, incompleteness and handicap, he had few doubts about the benefit in four cases out of every five. There was nothing for it, the Doctor insisted, but to go ahead by inches if they could not go ahead by bounds. To stop was to go back. This, of all moments the Committee had yet weathered, would be the most disastrous in which to hesitate, unless, indeed, the alternative might be not to attempt to open the place at all, but leave it standing—a monument of futility—until the rest of the needful money dropped down from Heaven somehow? Surely if even such a 'Hospital' as this were the best possible place for a sick man or woman, the Committee might hope its first patient would be the best possible thing for the Hospital!

If perseverance in the face of difficulties and an indomitability of spirit are necessary characteristics of a man to whom responsible or pioneering undertakings are confided, much more so must they be of him who initiates a thing so needful that it requires no apology, so premature that it finds little sup-

port. Liston kept his temper and his resolution as well as his head the more desperate the need of money, the more onerous the decisions to be reached. He had to realise now that upon one man's power, his own, and on one unknown woman's capacity of optimism, work, and resource, the whole thing must ultimately depend. Everything turned on keeping the thing going—and the Nurse! There were panicky resignations on the Board, and the Doctor had little doubt but that the whole body would have stood from under, with immense relief, if it could. Scarcity of money in the township was sapping their loyalty and faith, and reducing the Committee meetings to mere exhibitions of impotence and apprehension.

The day Liston sat down, unauthorised by any resolution on the Minute-Book, and wrote to Ottawa for a Nurse, the miraculously unexpected happened. It always does at a crisis.

Months previously he had written, among other people, to one of his sisters who had married since he left England, so his mother said, 'remarkably well.' His letter had gone straight to the point after characteristically brief circumlocution. Nellie must have altered very much if she had ever taken umbrage at his being the worst of correspondents. And now the answer came.

'Dearest old George,' Nellie said at the beginning of five closely covered sheets of foreign note, 'It was worth £100 to get

your letter and your news. . . . We all thought so . . . and I made a family round-robin of it, something on the snowball plan. Arthur made me a bet of £50 I couldn't raise another fifty so it would have been pretty mean if the others hadn't helped me out (quite apart from its being for you) although the whole lot of us remain the Church mice we ever were. I haven't a penny of my own, you know. . . I couldn't have won my husband's bet but for one or two lucky hits and chances. Most people over here don't see the point of sending money out to Western Canada. It is wanted at home in a thousand directions as badly as it can possibly be wanted elsewhere, and only the Archbishops of Canterbury and York seem to have understood the "golden opportunities" of the West in more senses than one. I went to some of Mr Ellison's meetings at the Albert Hall, and have often wondered how that wonderful experiment turned out of sending so many lay-men to the Saskatchewan diocese. If there can be no objection to an appeal in this country for thousands of pounds to help forward the Church of England work in the West, I don't see why there should be for Hospital work. The need of money is established in any case, and that's the main point. But I'm no good at debate, and when people argue that we can't afford to send coals to Newcastle I have only to go to Shadwell to believe them. It seems absurd, though, that the richest

country in the world should be supposed unable to afford a helping hand to the youngest. Nobody, again, dislikes the idea of her being asked to do so more than the Canadians themselves on this side. They seem to think it derogatory to the prestige of the West that anyone should have to go far afield, and even to England, for a comparatively small sum, and a contradiction of Western prospects. Arthur is very friendly with the editor of a Canadian newspaper in London, and he waxed quite hot about this the night he dined with us and I showed him your letter. He gave me a couple of guineas for your Hospital, but he flatly refused an appeal in the columns of the . . . *News*. It is only when you hit on the right people that you get any help—the Church people who have an instinctive sympathy for missions, and, as far as your work is concerned, the fathers and mothers of emigrant sons and daughters. One woman, a great friend of mine and not a bit well off, sent me a cheque for six pounds and told me not to thank her. She has sons in the West, (I don't know if they are anywhere near you, but you ought to find out), and rather than make remittance men of them she would like to give this to a Hospital which might be of infinitely greater benefit to them—or others like them. Do you think the work you are trying to do at Finlay is at all likely to be copied in other places, and to spread? If so one feels it's really like a bit of Empire building, George,

and you know we're all in high feather about the Empire just now. I thought it awfully nice of Mrs Bayly to write as she did, and I have quoted her like a gramophone all round. And Lady Lawson, who is the President of some emigration society or other, said something worth another three or four guineas to me ;—that with a population over here of nearly two million more women than men, the emigration of women had become an economic necessity to the country and to themselves, but that until the conditions for women were more favourable in the West, it was unconscientious to urge them to go. She said that emigration for women generally meant marriage, (Oh! by the way, I am sending some blouses for Sandra, and an old golf cape), that marriage meant motherhood, and that motherhood must mean terrible suffering for women where no doctoring or nursing is to be had. I risked a drawing-room meeting—just among my own friends—if she would come and speak for the Finlay Hospital. So she did, and I read your letter. The upshot was a gift on the spot—(promised) of sixteen pairs of sheets and pillow-cases—(tell me exactly how to send them out so as to avoid customs duty and all that)—and the best bit of news for you of all! My husband's mother will give you £90 a year, for three years, to salary the Nurse, only you must let us know about the Hospital's banking arrangements so as to have this money sent through a London branch'

There was a great deal more in the letter, for George was Mrs Nellie Hardie's favourite brother, but he read no further just then. He put it in his pocket and went round to thank Ethel Aldersey for her prayers.

'Though I warn you,' he admitted, delighted at the way she took the news, 'it may just as well have been Mrs Maloney and the saints.'

Ethel laughed, tears of pleasure in her eyes, and both hands clasped over her husband's arm.

'Oh, Doctor,' she declared, 'Mrs Maloney or the saints, or sinners like Ned and me, "Except the Lord build the house, their labour is but lost that build it!"'

'You might hand over Mrs Hardie's address,' the young clergyman suggested keenly, 'or mention the next time you write that I am in imperative need of a new stable. Our "Lambeth Palace" here would be all the more commodious for a lean-to at the back! And as for the organ fund!!!'

But Liston was gone, laughing, and striding down to the livery barn with fresh vigour. He must have the team out to get off to Gopher Creek. Nobody would know better what this money meant to him than Sandra.

A week later two momentous and extraordinary people landed in Finlay on the midnight westbound express. A fortnight earlier they had sailed from Liverpool, and the Doc-

tor's friend, the Commissioner at Winnipeg, with George's letter at his elbow asking for a porter and cook, bundled them along to Finlay. The immigrants pouring through the gateway of the West at the rate of twenty heavy trainloads a day, offered him an even more bewildering choice of bedraggled, weary, trainsick honeymooners than might be supposed from the infinite array of applications for hired help of all sorts on his books. That he picked out this pair rather than another for the prairie Hospital was a proof of real interest in a man at the head of such apparently chaotic and tumultuous affairs. And the reasoning that husband and wife would mean a saving of room, was at least as good a ground for the special licence as another (!) since how was the Commissioner to tell they had only met on the boat?

Mrs Giffen Liston recognised at once as the English housemaid married, and her husband for the grocer's assistant in the English High Street shop. They had a tremendous morning together, the three of them, pic-nicking in the Hospital kitchen, and getting things ship-shape. Mrs Giffen, with her hair in Hinde's curlers, had to be initiated into the mysteries of a Canadian stove, and Giffen made unpleasant, helpless discoveries that two of the castors on the bed 'wos missin', and 'we 'aven't got no soap.' It was like a 'ouse removin' she said, only there wasn't no furniture to speak of, and Liston would be interested to hear

as how she had lived with a doctor's family for eighteen months in Leeds. She was a personable girl, with twenty times the go in her of Giffen. In two days things were so far advanced that Mrs Rainer could come in, and the formal opening of Finlay hospital took place when Mrs Giffen, still in curlers and a big blue apron, got off the steps on which she was cleaning the transom over the front door, and opened it to a sorry little party outside.

A cutter was left at the edge of the broken ground where the snow began to disappear, and a worn-looking woman much incommoded, came slowly along the little plank path on her husband's arm. Dr Liston brought up the rear with Mrs Maloney, assuring that good soul his patient was in no immediate need of anything but a kindly eye keeping on her, until such time as the Nurse might be expected to arrive. Mrs Rainer wasn't going to bed. She was just going to stay quietly there in the Hospital and wait events—two or three weeks it might be—and all Mrs Giffen or Mrs Maloney would need to do would be to feed her up and keep her company. The Nurse might arrive any time, now, and meanwhile he and Tom would 'batch' it comfortably enough.

Liston left Mrs Rainer, divested of her hat and wraps, having tea with the Giffens, quite as much impressed at being the first patient in the Hospital as she was with the beautiful little building itself. He took

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Abe Rainer kindly by the arm and walked him away to the cutter.

'I wish it had been ready a month ago,' he said, 'she needs all the rest and quietude she can get. There's one thing—this gives her a chance now, and you've less call to worry than you have had any time these last few weeks. She'll have the best of care in a day or so, and I'm on the spot.'

'You'll pull her through it, Doc. . . . when the time comes. . . .'

'Never fear! Now don't you go anticipating trouble! We'll pull her through for you, Abe, but you mustn't want her home again too soon. It doesn't make any odds to you, with that ticket, how long she stops.'

The farmer untied the rope at the tying post, and got back into the cutter, drawing a miscellaneous collection of torn horse-cloths and much worn rugs about him. He had ten miles out to go, and though the break up was at hand and the air mild as a spring day, he looked cold and out of condition.

'Well—that's something to be glad of, anyway,' he conceded, 'for if her life depended on it, Doc., I haven't got another dollar in the Bank. There isn't nothing I wouldn't do for Mary, and she should stop here as long as needs be if it was a dollar a day and I got into debt for her keep to last me my time; but as it is, that's a good thing off her mind as well as mine.'

George looked after him as he turned and drove away down the hill.

Abe Rainer had been one of the first to avail himself of the hospital tickets as soon as they were printed. He had given five dollars down and a promissory note for the other five. So far about seventy tickets had been sold, but only three hundred dollars in actual cash represented the head of steam on which the Hospital had 'opened.' It would be a hard thing for men like Rainer if the sale of these tickets never amounted to the number on which the success of the insurance plan depended. 'If it was a dollar a day'—the lowest possible charge on any other system—represented mortgage then for Abe, debt and failure! As it was, Mary Rainer had jeopardised more than her own life already through overwork and dread of incurring Doctor's fees a moment before it could possibly be helped.

Liston took out his notebook a moment, and puckered his brows over two or three of the entries.

If—indeed!

If the slender chance before this woman now, *if* the Nurse who might turn up at any time, *if* he himself, succeeded in pulling Mrs Rainer through, it would indeed crown all this work and effort! There was quite a stir down in the hamlet that the first patient had been taken in to Hospital, but only Liston, the Doctor, knew what a justification and a triumph for it the salvation of this mother would be, and the preservation of her child.

For the first time the man himself felt the pulses of his own 'white passion.'

It was a great moment to him when those Hinde's curlers had opened the Hospital door to Mary Rainer. That the Rainers were no more to him, personally, than any other of the prairie folk about, but that the pregnancy of this woman and the struggle of this man were exactly typical of the unexaggerated needs the Hospital had been designed to meet illuminated his conception for him in all its relief, its singleness of aim.

Standing on the white hillside that mild March day with the snow everywhere caking into rotten ice in presage of melting, and the green coming of a very early spring, Liston saw for the first time that this long waiting to which he and Sandra had consented, simply meant that there are such things in life as 'larger loves and diviner dreams than the fireside ones.'

The case he had just admitted into Hospital was for him the epitome of a work that had become a moral passion, a 'moral passion which is after all the only real passion.'

And what of Sandra? Had not her patience and her selfless love proved it to him all these months of ups and downs, that for all her tender womanhood that which was in her for him needed but a breath to translate it from the red realm to the white? She had never been jealous of his work—jealous only that others could spend more on it and him than she!

. . . The remembrance brought his thoughts back to their accustomed plane, and to speculations dry and practical as to the expected Nurse. There had been nothing but the unvarnished truth in his letter to Ottawa. 'If, under the circumstances, I may not hesitate to describe, you feel justified in sending us a Nurse, I should be glad to have one at once. Should the work here necessitate two, we would not see her overdone, but I would telegraph you for a second.' It reduced the chances of the sort of rumpus an exigent woman might make, confronted with the task on the hill, to a matter of personal equation ; and the Doctor left it for the critical moment of her arrival, how to strike a balance between his sufficient authority and the apologies which would yet be her due.

The moment this Nurse stepped off the train down there at the little depôt, would be one fraught with even more fate for the Hospital, than the crises of its financial history. With her coming the thing passed beyond him, beyond the Committee, beyond everything but a woman's power to make or mar.

The thought of it gave him the secret 'jim-jams' as nothing else had done yet. . . .

Then one morning they got a telegram in Finlay that a Nurse was coming from Edmonton, and would be in on the mid-day train. Instructions had been wired from Ottawa, and a letter followed. Mrs Giffen made up another bed and prepared a little

room ; Mrs Rainer sat in a rocking-chair of Ethel Aldersey's and watched the village from her window ; and as the blasts of the eastbound express sounded round the bend of the line, one here and one there of the Hospital Committee made his way over to the depôt.

A small and solitary lady jumped off one of the cars. The Conductor handed down her grip, and she turned engagingly to the rather sheepish group of men apparently awaiting her.

It was Miss Alma Norway ! Unable to believe such luck, Liston strode forward—

Shelaughed and relinquished her bag to him.

'I could have told you I was going to have your Hospital for the asking, six months ago. That's it I suppose—on the hill?'

'Exactly, Miss Norway,'—he never felt so like a criminal in all his life. 'That's it, "on the hill"—Allow me to present the Committee—'

She wore a suit of white serge, with an enormous artificial rose fastened quite effectively where the revers of the coat, long and sloping, met over no pretensions whatever to a figure. A big white hat with a bit of black velvet in it somewhere, and two murderous black pins, completely eclipsed for those taller than herself, a face all good nature and intelligence. There was humour of a rare order in the large, generous mouth, and all the beauty of youth and clear curves

about her face, and the bare throat from which the furs she wore had slipped; she had affectionate brown eyes, serenely marked brows, and straight dark hair.

She received the introductions with bright self-possession, and the Doctor had the sensation that with her second glance up at the Hospital, she simply took over him, it, and the Committee at one go!

Carrying her little grip across the road behind her, the responsibilities of a twelve-month seemed to roll off his back, and Dr George Liston fell into line as the mere man he felt.

Mr Rogers had carried her off to his wife, a most hospitable, kindly woman (and consequently, to the best spread table in the hamlet). Liston was glad to think Mrs Rogers' beaming smile and trim, buxom figure, spotlessly clad, would appear in the doorway of the trim, spotless little house to welcome the newcomer.

Miss Norway walked on ahead as though just about to finish or begin a dance. She gave a delightful impression of sobriety and lightheartedness, as though quite equal to and prepared for grave things, but in no way likely to be swamped by them. She was, altogether, the freshest, most inspiring acquisition that had yet failed to the hamlet, and Liston felt satisfied she was one who would face the music up at the Hospital—for it amounted to that—provided others did their part!

He, and Duckworth, and Mackay left her at the Rogers' gate, and it was understood the Doctor would come back later and take her up the hill.

When she enquired if there were any patients in Hospital already, he felt the fateful moment was drawing itself out, and did not spare the necessary explanation.

'Indeed yes, Miss Norway. There is one. It was on her account I requested the Order to send us a Nurse now. She is just waiting; and you and I have a big task before us may come off any time.'

The little lady followed him with the respect of a Nurse and the attention of a comrade. She put a question or two.

'No. Just overwork beforehand—' he told her. 'You'll see her this afternoon——'

'You see, Miss Norway,' he volunteered, as presently she walked beside him up the Hospital hill, 'we've been taking the chances of criticism here for opening the place long before it is really ready. Mrs Rainer is the explanation. And at least so far as she is concerned, we certainly have all we want.'

Alma Norway was not the type of Nurse who asks first what sort of accommodation there may be for herself, and who guarantees her salary. She took a dancing step of sheer amusement, but soberly committed herself to the most generalised of comments, when he gravely added that some bedroom ware for her own room had been sent up that very morning.

Whether all this was wise or not, right or wrong, temporarily expedient or merely a case of arrested development likely to prove chronic, she was in no position to judge before she crossed the new unpainted threshold. By way of making conversation she supposed everything depended a good deal upon the expectations of the patients themselves.

'When people come to Hospital,' she remarked, 'they generally expect to find it a Hospital, and exactly everything that Hospital means.'

'Just so,' he agreed, 'but prairie folk will understand, Miss Norway, that as it takes some time to get a home together out here, it takes perhaps a little more to complete an institution. If they don't, it will be all up with us.'

She could be trusted to comment without fear. In a newcomer of less charm and less promise of a sporting courage, he might have had to disarm the criticism of the Order itself. He liked it, immensely, that all her initial interest had turned—as it should turn—on her prospective patient.

But as they entered the Hospital he took her first into the office for a business chat. Depositing his unbrushed hat on the top of a veteran desk (a piece of 'donated' furniture with a desperate refund freight, damages and secretarial history of its own, which had brought off the Committee with a dollar to the good), he offered her one of its two loaned chairs, and sat down. Afterwards they could go over the house.

In his hands completely, until this rather ceremonious if informal business of her induction was completed, (and she could get rid of him and look round for herself), Miss Alma Norway took another dancing step, and also, politely, sat down. There were white and green shades to the windows : she thought of netting across these and tacks, to keep out the flies in summer. There ought to be a peg, anyway, on the door. The desk was no place for hats. She wondered who had been responsible for the taste and cost of the carpet, and cheerfully welcomed the presence of a telephone !

'We haven't the use of it just yet,' said Liston turning over endless papers, 'the switchboard has gone astray and nobody can locate it on the line.'

'Gee!' remarked the Matron, 'then it's to be hoped they find it soon !'

His mouth twitched as he showed her this and that among the papers ; touched on the ticket scheme, the constitutions, and the steps they were taking to obtain incorporation.

'And when will the "building committee" go out and a "maintenance committee" come in?' she enquired.

'The building committee is in process of evaporation now,' he replied, 'but it will probably be returned by the subscribers generally, for an executive on the spot, since there are no other people in Finlay to elect. We hope to have an "Associate Committee" of Hospital representatives in all the outlying

districts, just to keep its end up where otherwise no one might hear of it, or subscribe.'

The ponderousness of it all was lit up by her shafts of fun. Frankly, she was not impressed. 'Finlay,' she thought 'a one-horse little place to have embarked on this.'

'Pray don't say that, Miss Norway,' Liston begged her, 'or you drive me into the corner that I embarked on it—'

'Which means,' she put in gaily, 'you will have to bear all the blame if it fails, and get little of the glory if it succeeds—isn't that about it?'

'Not quite, I hope! But now that the Order has embarked upon it, in you—'

'The Order!' she exclaimed. 'The Order hasn't done much more than give you a shove off. The grant doesn't mean more than that, Dr Liston. You'll have to sink or swim here now on your own. Surely that was understood when you applied?'

'Quite, Miss Norway. If it had not been for the Order I doubt if it would have been feasible to build a hospital here at all. Even as it is, the financial part of the thing is just a toss up—just a gamble with chances, like homesteading itself. But for all that, the Order has a sort of stake in us now, and its prestige would suffer if we sank. So I should hope if the worst came to the worst—'

'Why, if the best comes to the best you should say,' she rallied him, repentantly, 'the Order has hatched out another flourishing

municipal Hospital! That's happened before now, you know—only I should have thought a divisional point on the line, perhaps, would have been a better place to build.'

'Very likely, from all points of view but the one which weighed with us here,' he said, 'which should weigh first with everyone—or body—who takes any interest in the Nursing problem of the prairie. That is the need. Folk may be poorer here and far more scattered than at a divisional point, but they are just as likely to be sick and much worse off for neighbours or for help. And for that matter we are not going outside our own area for cases, or for support. There is no reason why, because we have a hospital here, every other little place up and down the line shouldn't have one too. It drives our area farther north and south than east and west, that's all.'

The Nurse followed him attentively.

'You don't think it's too big then?' she observed.

'What, the house? I scarcely think so. We have room for eighteen beds, but it is not proposed to run more than nine for the first year, just until we see how funds come in.'

'Even then,' she said, 'nine beds would make a two-Nurse Hospital, Dr Liston. The night and day duty, you know.'

'No doubt—if they were all occupied at once. That, possibly, would be exceptional for us here. Fortunately one salary, at least,

is secure. We have \$450 a year for three years, promised. But I believe, as Matron, yours is higher than that?'

'Yes, \$600,' she said. 'The Order fixes the figure.'

She was, properly enough, interested in the point, but not at all pressing.

'We will certainly apply for a second Nurse the moment you need her,' Liston said, 'but please understand, Miss Norway, the working of this place for at least a year will be nothing more or less than an experiment. That second salary will have to be begged, if we don't get our three hundred policy holders, as this desk, these chairs—everything in the Hospital—has been begged. Everything that has gone to the making of this place over and above the money raised on the spot and the Youville grant (which wouldn't account for more than half of it, at the outside), has been *begged*, and all that is still necessary to finish must be *begged*. Nobody who hasn't begged, knows what begging means! Personally I hate nothing worse. And as far as that goes, again, I shall not in future be able to devote so much time as I have done up to now, to this part of the business. I can't neglect my practice altogether, especially as I am intending to marry as soon as any real resumption of it will enable me to get some sort of a home together. Excuse these details, but it is due to you to know exactly how we stand.'

She made him a little bow.

'Well,' she said, 'I should hope that after all the trouble you have taken over it the Hospital will prove a good thing for you, Dr Liston.'

It was a moment or two before he committed himself to any reply.

'Possibly it may,' he returned at length, 'but the advantage to me will chiefly consist in a great saving of time, and in being able to do my patients and myself a good deal more justice. From the point of view of fees—well, I shall get them if I'm going to get them, or forfeit them if I must, much the same as before.'

'There is just one thing,' he added reflectively, 'which would excuse defeat here. And that would be a failure of crops. A bad harvest would finish the Hospital venture, but there would be no blame about it coming to anyone. In any other case'—but he felt it hard on her to wash out any of the Finlay dirty linen just then. He so thoroughly discounted it himself.

He had wondered sometimes if the philanthropic saints Mrs Maloney instanced to him so often, ever doubted in the financial or executive crisis of theirs, as to whether mere business considerations should have outweighed the faith with which they essayed to move mountains, at the outset of their undertakings. The 'valiant woman of Canada' herself, Madame d' Youville of the early Montreal, completed the purchase of an outlying farm whose rents in a few years' time

might be made to swell the income of her 'hospice' the day that building was razed to the ground by fire, and all its helpless inmates cast shelterless around her in the streets, and she found herself without a solitary cent.

His companion brought him back to the subject in hand.

There was another point. Was she to look to the committee for her uniform?

'Good Lord! I don't know. I never thought of that. What is your uniform?'

'Just white,' she said, glancing down to hide amusement. 'Kerchief and cap, you know. Is there a laundry here?'

'There is not. But we've got a washing-machine.'

'Then I'll wear grey,' she amended promptly, 'we shall only be inspected once a year.'

He glanced at her, approval warming every minute.

'Come on——' he said incisively, getting up and retrieving his hat, 'you had better see the place.'

There was nothing very complicated about showing an empty house. Alma Norway inclined, however, in the dainty way she had, to the Giffens and a fairly furnished kitchen, to the dispensary and its creditable display of stores.

'What does the Committee pay that pair?' she asked, as Liston showed her the way upstairs. She laughed at the idea of them having married to take the situation.

'Why didn't they charge you up for the license, when they were about it?' she enquired.

'Oh—they hadn't been long enough in the West to think of that.'

At the door of Mrs Rainer's room her manner assumed an air it did the Doctor's heart good to see. The responsibility of the position invested her with quite a pretty authority as she glanced round the ward, and took in Mrs Maloney and the patient.

'Sure, an' ye've not come before ye was wanted,' said the good Irishwoman, 'fur she's got the look of it on her now. That woman's sick, I says to myself the moment I saw her this morning. Sure, an' she's sick!'

The moment Miss Norway got outside with Liston, she guessed she would 'fix up Mrs Rainer right away.'

'Do,' he said, and they paused for a moment beside the door on the upper landing which should eventually lead to a balcony. Incidentally the girl tried the key in the lock, and took it out. 'Somebody will be committing suicide here,' she remarked. George Liston was not an expansive man, but there was something he had still to say to her.

'It will be for the people here, and the Committee to thank you for coming,' he said, 'but I wish I could tell you, Miss Norway, how grateful I feel to you myself. It might have been so different. If you had turned the thing down, or shown dismay—as you very naturally might have done—I should

have felt more like throwing up the whole thing myself than at any time since the doubt first assailed me as to whether it wasn't a foolhardy, or at least a premature venture. A Nurse coming here, and turning tail—coming here in any spirit but that in which you have come, would have damned this little place before it was fairly opened, and would have undone the work of eighteen very strenuous months.'

Alma Norway seemed to find that keyhole rather interesting. Then she straightened her slight shoulders, and looked him squarely in the face. But a courageous smile belied half her words.

'Don't you be any too sure I'm not going to turn tail,' she said.

CHAPTER XI

NONDESCRIPT DILEMMAS

BEFORE next morning Mary Rainer's boy was born.

It was a terrible case hovering between life and death all night, and the anxieties of it were by no means over when the Hospital's first baby was put peacefully to sleep in a little hammock alongside the mother's bed.

Everything had been to seek, as far as the Nurse was concerned, at the last moment, and there had been no time to forestall a dozen little handicaps which in such circumstances of emergency were inevitable. She came through what had been an ordeal for her as well as for Liston and the patient, unflustered. In uniform Alma Norway looked rather more like a Puritan maid than the accepted model of a starched Matron in stiff collar, cap and 'strings.' She wore a simple grey cotton dress with the demurest of white kerchiefs folded over her bosom leaving a little v at the soft throat, and sleeves of elbow length. But a cap whose breezy tilt refused to balance correctly on the wilful set of her hair struck as independent a note as its wearer could

desire, and a delicious air of almost rakish readiness to face the situation destroyed any subdued and half-toned illusions about the bright spirit that had come into the Hospital, informing it.

By eight o'clock next morning order and seemliness reigned in the little ward upstairs as if it had been a mere detail in a clock-work institution, and the Matron joined the fagged and tumbled Doctor for the breakfast Mrs Giffen had spread in the dining-room, with the lightness of a victorious beginning in her step, and of courage in her greeting.

They started with an amicable difference over an egg. She insisted—Matron in that house—that he should begin on it (another would be ready in a minute or two), but he waived this aside, and twice doggedly restored the object in dispute to her plate. Overridden a third time, Liston gave in without further word, and having done so, straightway broke the shell and calmly did as he was bid.

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It was untoward in one way, that as much accommodation as the Hospital could then boast should be taxed to the utmost within a fortnight of this opening, and before Alma Norway had had time to set the seal of her own efficiency upon what material lay ready to her hand.

Before the month was up there were nine patients in Hospital, and the Committee had

spent dollars telegraphing for a second Nurse. With nine patients to attend to, an awkward unaccustomed squad to manage in the kitchen, nothing yet about the house in running order, and no small regulations drawn up to define and support her authority, it looked for a few critical days as though the task would transcend Miss Norway after all. Everything had happened with a rush. The Hospital embarked full tilt on its career with a first case as precarious for days as any it had been designed to shelter, like an ill-found undermanned little vessel setting out to an unexpectedly rough sea in a fashion as unshipshape as possible.

Alma Norway clung on somehow, and Liston got an impression of her as only waiting through this first welter for a chance to show what she could do.

Whatever she felt like, really, she confined the doubt, the dismay, to the limits of her own heart and the four white walls of her scantily furnished little room. Sitting on the edge of her unmade bed late one sunny afternoon wrapped in an enormously beflowered kimono that made her look, she said, 'like a devil,' she reflected that never would Assistant Nurse be received by a more disreputable looking Matron or topsy-turvy Hospital. The patients—such of them as were not confined to bed—were all over the place and so were their friends. Mrs Giffen seemed to be washing up at ten o'clock at night, and as for herself she hadn't one clean

cap or apron left. Mountains of washing were in arrears, and downstairs everything more or less was in a pickle, for the man in default of a garden had not tumbled a bit to the handy rôle he should have played as outside 'porter.' Giffen indeed was turning out to be one of the unadaptable sort of immigrants. Unused to chopping firewood, cleaning out wells, and odd job carpentry, he neglected the man's work about the place he should have tackled, and pottering about in the kitchen instead, at last got it into his pluckier wife's head that this was because she was being overworked.

Alma Norway certainly expected people drawing a wage to earn it and the first little 'dust up' she was inexperienced enough in the difficulty of getting any hired help at all on the prairie, to precipitate, was her announcement of this fact. But on their side the Giffens no sooner made the inevitable discovery that they could double the money they were getting at the Hospital in almost any other situation in a town, than they chose their own ground in retort. It was a mere matter for them of waiting until some long lost or detained luggage of theirs chose to turn up, before they resumed their westward quest for fortune, and sprung a mine under the Matron's feet of which she recked as little as she knew.

But before this happened the second nurse arrived, and the Hospital quickly assumed a totally different aspect.

Annie Garnet was a quiet, self-effacing girl of an antithetical type to the winsome creature charged with capturing the reins of this runaway little institution. The two understood each other at once, and a strong liking born of generalship on the one side, and a capability of doing good work to the greatest advantage in a subordinate position, on the other, cemented an immediate confidence between them of which the upshot was model order and model management in the Hospital. Miss Garnet might have made nothing at all of the Finlay proposition on her own account, and beyond those points of contact her engagement there caused between herself and the Doctor and the Committee, she kept sedulously, though in no studied manner, in the background. Infinitely less effective a personality than Miss Norway, Annie Garnet was quietly and deftly in place in the sick room, appropriate to her rôle of general 'staff,' and in her little striped uniform coming and going about the house, or sitting in the leisured afternoon folding and tacking bandages, she soon became an integral part of the sunny seemly whole. Every cleanliness, neatness, and Spartan simplicity that should characterise a hospital however lowly, was united under Miss Norway's management with a hundred and one ingenious ways of supplying for deficiencies and securing every comfort.

It had been as excruciating a joke to the one as appalling a surprise to the other of

these two city trained girls that the prairie men and boys, especially the bachelors, not only never used such things, but actually came to Hospital innocent of any sort of night or toilet requisities.

The first time Alma Norway discovered one of her patients, a hulking great rail-roader on the verge of a more uproarious indisposition than the neuritis for which he had been admitted, cutting about the Hospital as he was born, luridly demanding something better than water to drink, she nearly collapsed with a mixture of outraged grey and white propriety and an agony of repressed laughter. It was the work of a twinkling of an eye to reduce that person to an abject state, and to consign him summarily to bed again garbed in one of her own small nightdresses all lace and pink ribbons round the neck. After that she had to make the rounds of the other little wards whose doors had been standing open and reassure the horrified ladies therein, one or two of whom had risen right up in their beds, and flopped up to their armpits over the rail at the foot!

Annie Garnet enquired one day what was to do about it when a case of glands beguiled the hours of convalescence roving round and round the hamlet with a strident mouth-organ until someone stood him a drink at the bar. And another difficulty cropped up, imposing tactful limits on the Matron's natural gift of candour, when lovers made a trysting place of her office.

Liston was in and out all day and every day, and more than one member of the Committee came up of a Saturday to make toffee with her in the kitchen.

All the ladies of Finlay 'called' one by one, or in pleasant little groups, and it was seldom a day went by without one or the other of the two Nurses receiving an invitation out to tea or to a prairie drive.

Patients came and went: after the first rush, things were not so congested again, but an average of about four cases at a time kept Miss Norway and Miss Garnet busy, and frequently Dr Liston did a bit of minor surgery which occupied an hour or so and was presently discharged.

In a very short while the Hospital was running as satisfactorily and as creditably as was to be expected, and the Doctor even ceased to be so acutely and incessantly aware of the responsibilities and anxieties in connection with it as a man may whose back is growing accustomed to the yoke. He had solid reasons indeed to hope that everything was going to turn out well after all. For it really seemed as the summer ripened and harvest-time began to be the uppermost subject of speculation in all men's thoughts and mouths that the daring and the risk of the undertaking were to be justified by the success which had always depended ultimately on that great but negotiable factor.

There had been some weeks of protracted drought in the early part of the year, and

the late springing of the crops and their slow progress in consequence had left few of the farmers much hope that cutting would start before the first frosts of the fall had damaged the wheat. But in June and July came a series of those heaven-sent twenty-four hour deluges of welcome rain which really sank the necessary inches into the thirsty land, and immense stretches of open prairie which had been blackened and burnt by untimely fires, were reclothed with verdant green as by a miracle in the night. The wilting acres of wheat shot ahead into tall upstanding crops and an immeasurable sense of relief, of renewed hope, pervaded the whole community. A day or two longer without rain and many men would have turned their cattle off the failing pastures into the weed-ridden crops.

The only untoward incidents all this while were the changes in the kitchen which took place after the Giffens left. A series of more or less unsatisfactory make-shifts and temporary experiments in the matter of hired help presently forced this problem into greater prominence than anybody had been prepared for. There did not seem to be a spare pair of hands in the whole community, and scour the country as Liston or Mr Aldersey might in search of a man and wife, or woman and hired boy, to take their places, none seemed at liberty. For awhile Mrs So-and-So would volunteer to put in a few days at the Hospital to oblige Miss

Norway, and another hard-working woman would overcharge her own wash day with a mountain of soiled linen from it, but, though she appreciated all this goodwill at its worth, it irked the little Matron unendurably to have matters managed so. The Committee advertised in the Edmonton papers for a porter or cook, but the wages asked were prohibitive. Mr Murray sent along another pair of new-wed immigrants but they took a better paid situation at a hotel *en route* and failed to put in an appearance at all. Mrs Rogers went down to Trenchminster thirty miles east on the line, and Mrs Dunn to Mooseberry seventeen miles west, to hunt all day in vain for anyone who would take the post. Everybody else in either town seemed to be in need of the hired help that was nowhere to be had. A hundred women and girls, or men either for that matter, could have obtained situations at any point along the line within an hour of setting out to look for them. The proprietors' wives in nearly every hotel were struggling along in their own kitchens for want of serving girls, and even the better situated people who would have kept maids if they could have found them, were doing all their own work like the farmers' wives on the prairie. At last a time came in the Hospital when there were no more volunteers to be had and no more suggestions to be made. The whole work of the house as well as the nursing devolved on Alma Norway and her assistant.

For by now the prairie women were everywhere organising themselves into parties to go 'berrying' in preparation for the annual orgie of jam-making against the winter time. No one talked of anything but the rise in the price of sugar, when plums might be expected in the market, and how many pots of this, that, or the other fruits Mrs Babcock or Mrs Fane were rumoured to have already put down.

The summer rains had filled every bluff and coppice with swelling berries, red, purple, and black. The gorgeous saskatoons, with a bloom on them like that of grapes, literally glowed among the fairy leafage of the dainty trees that bore them, and the bright red pin-cherries startled the sunshine in every mazy spinney. Tangled thickets of wild raspberry bushes fringed the prairie meadows where sweet-scented hay, new mown, lay drying in the sun, the far flung windrows distilling peppermint on every breeze. There were gooseberries here and there, and in many a pasture the ground ran with the diminutive wild strawberry.

It was a fine opportunity for picnics, and all round the district the dates fixed for them in this place, or in that, got about by word of mouth, and no single one was marred or postponed on account of bad weather. But there was not a woman in the hamlet or on the homestead who could be spared from her more immediate duties just then, to help in the Hospital.

So Miss Norway struggled along manfully as best she might, often a very overtaxed little woman indeed, in the last hope that the forthcoming Sports Day in the village, would attract so big a muster from the surrounding country that some girl, at least, would be discovered in the crowd not unwilling to remain in Finlay as the Hospital cook. Liston watched her overdoing herself from day to day, but exacting no more than she had any right to expect from Miss Garnet, convinced that it could not be a matter of many more days before she broke down. He was thoroughly concerned about her, and resolved to put the whole thing to Sandra, whether Miss Norway liked it or not, if Sports Day drew a blank.

Finlay's annual festival was generally held on the second of July, but this year it had been postponed so as not to clash with that of a neighbouring hamlet. It was not therefore until just before harvesting began, when the hay was all cut and stacked, and the golden wheat had been scorched red in the late August sun, that the occasion was to be celebrated.

The Hospital Committee awaited it with impatience. It would indeed seem absurd if, of all the problems with which it and they had yet been confronted, this one of hired help in the kitchen were to prove the most stubborn and the most critical. That the Hospital should have to close not for want of funds, not for want of a staff or appliances,

but for want of a cook and chore boy seemed as ignominious as likely. Miss Norway could not go on indefinitely, with only Miss Garnet to fall back upon. Fortunately the Nurses had only had light cases of late and little night work, but at any moment something serious might be brought in, and the situation would again be imposing on their long suffering and their strength. Very conceivably indeed this difficulty might prove to be the rock upon which the Hospital would strike and founder after all!

Everybody was keen about Sports Day, from Alma Norway, to the fellow who hoped to win a few dollars in a race to begin to pay for the horse he rode! The previous year pretty little Mrs Fane the postmaster's wife, and the bouncing good-natured sister of the proprietor of the hotel had provided themselves with collecting boxes and white ribbon tags, and raised half a hundred dollars in five cent and quarter pieces for the Hospital building fund. Liston counted upon them for another effort of the sort this year. It would clear off quite a lot of small bills if anything like that sum were to be raked in again. But he hoped for a good deal more.

Sports Day was a very glorified picnic indeed, with an ambitious programme of events, organised for it beforehand by an express Committee offering various prizes. The race track, just on the northern outskirts of the village, was a big ploughed circle well

harrowed and prepared, across which two prairie trails converged on the little Main Street. A special football team came to play the Finlay Athletic Association; and the Rev. Mr Wrack, Edward Aldersey's diocesan superior, a strenuous humanistic clergyman of the modern 'fighting parson' description, eminently suited for pioneer work on the prairie usually came from Mooseberry with a strong contingent of friends to help mightily at the Finlay Church booth, and to put heart into the proceedings generally. It would be a poor Sports Day which did not muster a crowd of some four or five hundred people, and bring quite a lot of money into the little place, together with a great deal of fun and more neighbourly good feeling than the rival mushroom towns up and down the line permitted themselves to betray on any other pretext.

But about three days before this auspicious date an incident occurred which, promising at first sight to resolve one perplexity, plunged Liston into something of a dilemma.

It had been decided when the Committee drew up the rules as to what cases should or should not be admitted to the Hospital, that nothing chronic should be retained longer than the time necessary to see if any betterment might be hoped for, and that nothing infectious except typhoid—which is nursed in general wards throughout Canada—should be taken at Finlay.

One morning the little Matron and the

Doctor turned out of a store together where they had chanced to meet, and were passing the open door of the Pool Room, when Mr Rogers, shirt-sleeved and cue in hand, catching sight of them, rushed out and hailed them.

'Say, Doctor! Say, Miss Norway—here's the chance we've been looking for! See that box car over there side tracked beyond the depôt? There's a party of Russian or Galician immigrants over there waiting for some waggons to pull away out north, and the finest and most strapping bit of goods in the shape of a hired girl you ever set eyes on. I was over to see 'em a matter of half-an-hour ago, and I said to myself at once, "that's the girl for our money up there on the hill!"'

'Good for you, Mr Rogers,' Alma thanked him, 'did you speak to her about it?'

'I? why no. I don't talk Russian.'

'That's not necessary,' put in Liston, with a dry smile, 'any tongue will do to argue the dollar proposition. Come on, Miss Norway, we'll see what we can do, anyway.'

'I'd come over with you,' Rogers excused himself, 'but I'm just in the middle of a game with a couple of commercials inside. Let's know the upshot—'

Alma ran after the Doctor, already half across the road. In three minutes they had reached the depôt.

A box car roughly carpeted with straw had been uncoupled and shunted, and its occupants, some dozen men, women and

children, were hanging about the platform and the depôt amid a miscellaneous collection of their unloaded possessions in the shape of boxes and bundles. Mannerless uncouth folk they looked, and the girl of whom Rogers had spoken was a heavy shapeless young peasant with a broad red face lit up by a certain grinning good humour, but no ray of intelligence beyond that evoked by the word 'dollar.' She remained sitting on a box under a running fire of Alma Norway's interrogations looking like nothing so much as an immense sack of potatoes confronted by an exasperated little cyclamen. Both huge red hands on her wide splayed knees, she laughed and nodded in a meaningless manner, and gave no sign of comprehension. Liston routed out one young fellow more or less competent to translate the offer to her of employment, then and there, at as many dollars a week as she might prove worth. But with whomever among the elders of the party standing round lay the decision of its acceptance or rejection, this seemed to be by general consent a negative one. An elderly man, too surly to hear the dubious or listless interpreter to a finish, left things to a shrivelled old woman bandying shrill and irrelevant talk with two or three impassive companions who made no comment one way or the other. Nothing indicated that the girl herself either entertained the proposal, or bowed to the advice or contrary wishes of the others, except that after the sporadic quarrel the

subject precipitated died down, she remained sitting, broadly grinning as before, on the box! She wore a black cotton dress and a red handkerchief tied three-cornerwise over her head. Alma Norway could picture her very satisfactorily indeed, at the washtub, and scrubbing the floors, and it was some little time before she turned away, disheartened, and gave up the attempt to convey and persuade.

They seemed to have drawn a blank again.

Just at that moment she caught sight of Liston emerging from the travel-stained car with so extraordinary an expression on his face compounded of consternation and rapid calculation, that, accustomed as she was by now to read him at a glance she saw something momentous had occurred.

He caught her mute enquiry, and shooting out a dubious lower lip walked off out of earshot. She gathered he wanted her, and joined him down on the grass beside the track.

'I'm rather afraid we're in for it now, Miss Norway,' he said, pushing his hat from a pale, worried brow. 'If I'm not balmy there's a case in there may give us some trouble.'

The curious way he stood and stared at her signified quite a cloud in his mind, but whether as to diagnosis, or as to the next move, Alma was left to enquire.

'Both,' he said, and thrust his hands in his pockets. He turned and walked slowly along the track.

'Who is it—what is it?' she demanded.

'A boy—rashy. But it's too soon to diagnose anything with certainty.'

She paused on one of the ties. 'Let me go and have a look——'

The grip with which he retained her almost belied Liston's last words.

'Where'd you change?' he reminded her. 'There's fever, and flush, and drowsiness: I can't be certain about the eruption because, as you'd say, the car was pretty dark and the boy was dirty—but it looked to me like'

He broke off, and glanced down the line into the sunny flat distance as a figure picking its way towards them along the ties resolved into the Station Agent, the taciturn conscientious man Liston would least of all care to involve in any dilemma about duty.

'Like what?'—she hesitated—'measles?'

His deliberation was exasperating.

'No one could quite say yet. May be nothing much. May be some beastly eastern European disease which takes just about as long to incubate as these people have been on the road, and at that rate we're going to get the benefit of it here. Otherwise they'd have nabbed the whole bunch at Belle Isle, or Winnipeg. Point is whether it's my duty or not to quarantine it.'

'You can't,' she said decisively, 'here, and now! Besides, who'd take it in? Not the hospital.'

An infectious case has to be reported on detection, and may be sufficient cause to

quarantine the place where it occurs for six weeks. There had been diphtheria at Finlay some two or three years ago, and for that period not a single soul had come into the place or left it, at least by rail. To precipitate this sort of an impasse on the eve of Sports Day would be bad enough, but to have a place quarantined where a hospital more or less for maternity cases had not long been opened was a still more serious matter! If by any chance prejudice should come to be attached to it the thing was foredoomed.

But to fail to comply with the rule would, naturally, cost a medical man dear. No amount of zeal for the reputation of an Institution might compensate him, professionally, for the loss of his own, or, indeed pay his fines.

Alma Norway's quick mind took all this in at a glance, but jealous as she, too, might be for the Hospital, her strenuous refusal to let the difficulty get the better of them so overwhelmingly and so gratuitously at this particular moment of all others, would not let her stand by and see the Doctor persuade himself to risk, perhaps, his very livelihood for its sake. It was useless to try to dissuade her from seeing the boy.

'What's he lying on?' she demanded, 'a bed?'

'No, just on the straw, curled up in the corner. He had his coat rolled up under his head. If I got him out into the light I could, no doubt, make a better examination

but it's no use to give the show away until we know what's best to be done.'

'Is anyone doing anything for him?'

'Apparently not, but one can't go by that—you saw what they were, those people. The fellow who tried to interpret a bit turned the boy over and waked him up, but he only clutched his head with his hands and scratched it like a monkey.'

Her face caught the gravity of his. Then a fighting light leaped into her eyes and her whimsical mouth curled at one corner.

'Doctor,' she declared, 'you've worked yourself into a state of nerves. My head or your head wouldn't long be very comfortable in that car! I just don't believe a word of it, and with all due respect to you I'm going to have a look for myself.'

Liston seldom argued. 'But wait a bit,' he said, 'I'll speak to Nicholls,' the Station Agent had at length come up to them, 'I want to ask him when the car came in. It's to be hoped to goodness none of those people have been around at all in the village.'

Miss Norway he reflected was so much more recently out of the training school than he, and after many weeks of absolute satisfaction with her skill the man had grown to estimate her almost instinctive understanding of sickness no more highly than it deserved. He *had* to let her see this boy.

They turned and drifted back with Nicholls. The Agent, one of the most respected

men in Finlay, kept himself to himself by strong natural inclination as much as by an incredible press of work for so insignificant a station. He entertained, however, a sincere regard for the Doctor, and was always ready to lend him any assistance in his power.

He had not, he said, noticed anyone sick among this bunch.

'There a boy in the car, seems a bit off colour,' Liston admitted.

The Agent smiled dryly.

'Likely as not. I've known two or three as couldn't ride out to the homestead without falling off once or twice after too many "soft" drinks. Perhaps that's all that's wrong with him, Doctor.'

'I hoped none of them had left the depôt. What time did the car come in?'

Nicholls considered.

'About six this morning,' he returned, 'Now you mention it I don't think they have—not unless it's since I went up the line, a matter of half-an-hour ago.'

'How long will it be before they get a move on?' Alma asked, 'we came over to see if the girl was to be hired, but there's no making head or tail of them. They're homesteading aren't they, up north?'

'Who said so?' and again the Agent smiled as she told him.

'If Mr Rogers never made no bigger mistake than getting hold of the wrong end of the stick he'd be a wiser man than most. There's others beside him got big notions

of what makes a place a "star" place on the map, Miss Norway. The Hospital's more like to do it than the lead of these people here.'

'You don't mean they aren't coming in to this district?'

'Why no. It was by some mistake the car was dropped here. They're going on to Herrenhut. I got instructions about it, and the 15.30 will pick her up, I guess.'

Liston and Alma Norway both drew a long breath of relief. This, then, solved the difficulty!

'Good!' ejaculated the Doctor. 'Keep the whole lot out of the town, Nicholls, send them as sharp as you can, and let me get in on your wire. Maybe you'll have some more instructions before the 15.30.'

He owed to her as they left the depot and retraced their steps to the hamlet, what his surmise had been, and how he had notified the immigration and medical authorities further on.

Alma Norway was thankful to leave it at that. Liston was the most quixotic doctor she had ever had to deal with; she could not make up her mind how things might have fallen out if this case had been stranded at Finlay.

'All the same,' she said, laying her little hand, frankly affectionate, on his arm, 'the thing is getting on your nerves, Doctor. Why don't you take a drive out to Gopher Creek this afternoon, and ask Sandra to come back with you, and save it getting on mine?'

CHAPTER XII

A STAR OF NO DIMENSIONS

IF the Doctor had been at all loath, which in fact he was not, to act finally on the little Matron's suggestion, a mishap that occurred to Miss Garnet the same afternoon, left him no choice.

Sandra and the Nurses had met, of course one way and another, quite a few times ere now, but it was obvious to Liston she dreaded putting herself in the way of conceiving any unworthy feeling.

An extraordinary mixture of emotions indeed, invaded the big shy prairie girl's breast the evening he came out to the Creek all unexpectedly, and not waiting to unhitch, reminded her she had promised to help him at a crisis. As she came up from the river driving the milking cows before her, Sandra caught sight of the familiar buggy and her mother's buxom figure standing beside it. Mrs Dunn put her hand across her brow to shield the western sun from her eyes; she made vigorous signs to the girl to hurry. Her skirts were blowing about in the wind.

'You don't say!' she cried. 'Just you listen to this, Sandra! Miss Garnet's cut

her hand that bad, she won't be able to do a single thing with it for days, and Miss Norway she don't know where to turn for a soul to help her. I've been telling George it won't take you no longer than you need to get out of that torn frock, to be ready to start right back with him now. Lands sakes! but I'd come with you myself, and only too glad to do it, if it weren't for leaving the place and the children. Right glad I'd be, I tell you!'

Sandra came up to the buggy, and laid her hand on the thin rim of the wheel.

'I wouldn't drag you into it like this,' George explained, 'only to make a convenience of you, dearest, if we hadn't really been stuck. Miss Norway was indignant a fortnight ago that I should think of such a thing, but to-day she downright asked me to come out and fetch you. She really needs you, Sandra.'

Liston's little Matron at her wit's end was quite a new proposition. A faint flush came into the girl's face. She took her hand from the wheel and dusted it against her skirt.

'Of course, George, I'll come. I'm sorry Miss Garnet's hurt herself that bad. How did she do it?'

He drew off his driving gloves for the purpose of illustration, and showed them.

'She went down into the cellar to fill a bucket with water from the tank, and the box she stood on gave way under her feet. She clutched at the edge to save herself, and tore all these muscles of the palm right down

almost to the bone, from here to here,' and he indicated the entire ball of the thumb, from the fork of the hand to the wrist.

'My land!' ejaculated Mrs Dunn, her kind motherly face the picture of concern. 'Just think of that now.'

'Yes, it was pretty bad. I had to put five stitches in it. It was all that delayed me getting here.'

'Run, Sandra,' bade her mother, 'there isn't any time to waste, It 'll be dark long long before you get to Finlay.'

It was part of that lot of hers she had thrown in with George over this undertaking, that Sandra should not hesitate to redeem her promise. She ran through the shack and to that little lumber lean-to at the back of it, which, originally a store place for flour sacks, had lately been turned into her bedroom. It boasted, indeed, of one or two specimens of the awful 'golden oak' furniture, in the shape of a bureau and rocking chair, with which Winnipeg supplies the whole of the North West ; of a low camp bedstead spread with dark blankets, and of a row of pegs for her hard-worn clothes. Hurrying now to get ready, Sandra left the little place in unaccustomed disorder. It was only the thought that Alma Norway was more or less in trouble, helped her to forget the dreaded comparison which must institute itself, she thought, when she, in the kitchen, became associated with the Nurses, in the wards, of George's Hospital. There was

little fighting element in her love. She was one of those women in whom the very depth and tenderness of such a feeling recoils from the arena of a rivalry. All the misgivings came back upon her to which she had been ashamed to own that day in the stable, when by the unlucky fortuitousness of things, the very comfort Liston had found for a nascent jealousy in her heart, however innocent, seemed to commit her to bigger proofs than this.

But if her comment as she kissed her mother good-bye, and they drove away, that Miss Norway wouldn't be wanting her when she found out how unreliable her baking was, reminded George of what it must cost a girl of Sandra's diffidence to come forward and offer even these humble services, he was yet glad of the turn of events which carried her to Finlay. Nothing, he felt confident, would sooner allay the wistfulness of Sandra's attitude to some aspects of the work there, than finding herself in daily contact with a girl who must inevitably become for her generous impressionable nature nothing if not a marvel and a heroine.

For the moment, however, little of this was in his mind.

He slipped an arm about his sweet companion on the return journey, and told her it was an ill wind, indeed, which blew nobody good! What a thing it was to know he would be seeing her every day—. Had Sandra thought of that?

Before they had gone a mile Bill dropped knowingly into a walk. George drove carelessly without heed to him, and the horse understood the symptoms of slack lines well enough. There were times, it seemed, when he was not expected to hustle.

The level rays of the sinking sun gilded all the valley. Sandra, womanlike, was over and above content with the moment, but it was not always she returned the look that dwelt so intimately upon her, and she noted when the day died and the brightness faded from the land.

A tender radiance low in the twilit eastern sky, almost like a white cloud, pulsed against the oncoming night. By the time the buggy had crossed the river-valley and was climbing the wooded escarpment whence it had come, the glow had mounted and spread, and now an immense bow of palest incandescence spanned the vault above, from these white fires in the east to where the trailing skirts of a gold and rosy sunset still lingered in the west. It had been cold in the valley and Sandra was glad as they struck the warmer levels of air regaining the hills.

'My!' she said, suddenly, 'just look, George, at the Northern Lights!'

The heavens were now almost dark and the bow had resolved itself into the vast sinuous fringe of some heavy hanging invisible curtain swaying gently across the world spaces as though the sigh of the evening stirred its

folds. Moment by moment as the night deepened the fringe grew brighter and more distinct, and above the heads of the man and the girl gazing up at it, glorious prismatic colours flashed and sparkled as though from the million crystal prisms of which it seemed to consist. They expected to hear the musical tinkle of glass lustres as the fringe floated and swept to and fro, as it seemed, but a few yards up in the dark air. But a deeper stillness than usual reigned over the sleeping prairie, and in profoundest silence the Northern Lights waxed more and more brilliant. Beyond the almost fearful fringe flashing mauve and opal glories into their eyes, vast circles of light, ringed the heavens and girt the stars, like the dim choirs of white-robed angels seen afar off, or the visions of Dante's paradise. Seldom had Liston seen a more magnificent display.

Momentarily the phantasmagoria waxed more marvellous. Wonderful streamers of radiance flushed and faded everywhere athwart the sky like shifting veils of some angelic transformation scene in Heaven, whose massy throngs of spirits were rather hidden than discernible to human eyes for the flooding glory of their whiteness.

Beyond their radiance the night was so indigo, that before the buggy got half-way to Finlay, the Doctor could only tell his direction by keeping a well-known star between his horse's ears.

He asked the girl why she was so quiet.

'I don't know what on earth we should do, Sandra dearest, if you couldn't have come,' he observed, reverting, as she made no particular reply, to the more general aspect of their journey. 'Sometimes it seems to me that the stars in their courses are fighting against the Hospital.'

The weird howl of a coyote sounded in the distance like an answer. Sandra shivered slightly and murmured a protest.

'Don't say that, George. It don't help any, even to think it.'

'I suppose one can never be up against things so badly *some* way out can't be found—' he reflected, and kissing her, thanked her again for coming. It must have cost his sweet Goose Girl quite an effort to leave those familiar surroundings in the little log shack by the river, and come out into the blaze of Finlay publicity? He rallied her and made some fun of her shyness. The public eye in Finlay was so formidable, wasn't it? Half the time, it was sleepy as an owl's at mid-day.

George had no doubt about it in his own mind, had he ever wished to quicken Sandra's interest in his work, that nothing could have aided him better than the circumstances which took her to the Hospital. And that this was the right way out for more than the immediate difficulty was growing clear to him, now, with every mile of the way.

But the girl made little response. She cowered slightly instead.

'Don't it seem close,' she said, looking up.

Liston followed her glance, and felt almost as though he too must stoop his head.

The glory in the heavens culminated. The scintillating fringe of light suddenly broke its immense line, and gathering itself into the semblance of a mighty hand with restless luminous fingers down-stretched, hovered above them, as though about to pluck them up into the night.

'I shouldn't have left it so late,' George said, oppressed himself with a desire to elude the monstrous mystic thing. 'But you aren't afraid, darling, are you?'

He drew the whip lightly over old Bill's back and the animal shot forward as though stung. . . .

On a slight rise to the right of the trail a pretty wolfish face with two pricked ears gleamed like the ghost of a dog in the strange silver light. It was a grey coyote on its haunches. It rose nervously as the buggy rolled by, and followed for awhile, trotting silently like an embodied fate.

It was late when at last they came upon the village. Only two lights twinkled from a couple of houses in the Main Street but up on the crest of the hill the Hospital windows shone, outposts in the wilderness of that vigilant army of women charged all the world over with the care of the sick and dying. Alma Norway, on duty, awaited their coming.

Sandra got out of the buggy without any ado as Liston reined up, and waited while he hitched Bill to the tying post.

A little figure whiter than ever as to arms and kerchief appeared, on the inside of the door, to wrestle for a moment with the handle, then ran out along the plank footpath, buffeted by the night wind, to meet them.

'Why isn't this just dear of you!' she cried, catching at Sandra with one hand and her fly-away cap with the other. 'Gee! Dr Liston, but it's lucky for you she's come! I've been just in two minds whether I wouldn't take and skidoo on the night train.'

George laughed and battled with the door behind them.

'It won't hurt Sandra any,' he said, 'not to know that your bark is worse than your bite, Miss Norway. I'd like her to think she'd prevented a flight on your part.'

He took off his hat in the queer manner he had, as though on second thoughts, and would have bid the newcomer hearken to this by way of the happiest induction, but that a proprietary little hand was already gratefully slipped in Sandra's.

'I should say!' Alma protested, 'Why Doctor, we'll have a baby with a double hare lip in here to-morrow! The mother brought it to town about an hour after you started and is waiting overnight to see you. Give me another baby, *and a hare lip baby at that*, in this hospital just now, and you'll see Alma taking the trail.'

'No,' he returned, none the less dryly for the amusement in his eyes, 'I'll see Sandra

taking the baby. Nothing could suit her better. Why—that's just fine !'

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The difficulty of the choreboy, too, solved itself all of a sudden, as perfectly as some difficulties have a way of doing only at the point when any solution, even the wretchedest, would have been acceptable.

A buggy drove slowly up to the hospital one day shortly after Sandra's arrival, with a very death's head of a wasted creature in it, whose husband and weeping daughter carrying her, had entertained little hope of conveying alive twenty-six miles across the prairie. Mrs Moreland had been ill for weeks ; the case was now desperate, and to bring it to hospital had been the last and forlornest hope. Only an operation might have saved her, but the poor soul was too far advanced along the Valley of the Shadow by now for the risk to be worth while. She would certainly sink under the ordeal. The Finlay Nurse and doctor kept their own counsel, but the former was a trifle inclined to deplore, privately to him, the bringing of anyone there just to die. She should have been left in peace to the end. And it might mean a good deal to the reputation the Hospital had to make for itself if no cases ended fatally there for the first few months.

George Liston was standing before the shelves in the dispensary selecting various things with the dogged air of a deliberate

man who scarcely doubts about what it were best to try when there is not the slightest hope in his trying it. He glanced at the girl who never hesitated to put into words exactly what he was thinking himself. There was only one faint chance, he knew, for Mrs Moreland, and that resided in the cool firm little hands and arms now folded, less in argument than in consultation, across Alma Norway's own waist.

Nurse Garnet with one hand bound up, was getting the patient to bed, while the old gentleman and his daughter, Mrs Walton, waited to be allowed to see her again and Sandra ventured to put into them what heart she could.

Moreland was tremulous with anxiety, but full of an extraordinary reverence for the man and woman who might possibly do something yet to save his much loved wife. He glanced round the Hospital in amaze, never having dreamed Finlay could boast of a place like this! He was obviously a superior man in every accent and gesture: only the faintest self-consciousness marked his hope that the nurse and doctor were not insensible to his appreciation of it and them, however little, as a gentleman, he might be called upon now to express this. Liston and Miss Norway were too much preoccupied with the case to be impressed with anything more about the old man and his daughter, at the moment, than their grief and apprehension, although it was patent to either these

were not ordinary prairie folk. Sandra got them both a cup of tea, and they went away to the hamlet for the night, unable to pull out again for the homestead without the news twelve more hours at the most, would bring.

And before morning a miracle happened, wrought by a slight girl's skillful hands and her untiring night-long devotion to an awful task.

She flew to the door as Liston again came up the footpath in the pale light of dawn, and flung it open to him. One glance at the triumphant little figure, cap more awry than ever, and the vividest emotion flashed into his care-lined face.

They exchanged but the briefest query and answer.

This thing reported in a medical journal would be sufficient in itself to establish a high reputation for the Finlay Hospital. But neither he nor she were journalists, or thought of that.

He stepped into the warm silent house.

Upstairs Mrs Moreland was now resting peacefully, and Alma Norway gave him the details of the miracle that had saved her life. Frightful, unspeakable details they were, as vile as the corruptible clay which imprisons the human soul ; details the like of which alone plumb the abyss of that Divine condescension when 'the Word was made flesh'. But never more beautiful than out of horror like this had the Doctor's vision risen, trans-

figured before him, of the worth and meaning of his hospital.

He was never emotional. Only that old felt hat of his pitched lightheartedly on to the staircase finial, and the way he stood in thought a moment, regarding his splendid little friend and co-adjutor, gave Alma Norway proof of the exultant vindication she had wrought through all those hours of weary massage, for the man whose measure she began to understand.

The sick woman feebly turned her clay-coloured face from which the damps of death had now passed, and looked at them both as they reëntered her room. The dull eyes travelled laboriously in their livid sockets from the girl to the man, and two gnarled ivory hands lying on the coverlit made an unavailing effort as though to join themselves in prayer.

There came a hoarse laboured whisper.

'She is the Angel of this Temple of Healing.'

But outside the ward once more Alma laughed away this praise, 'Then you must be the High Priest, Doctor Liston! We'll have to crown you with roses, and dinky little blue ribbons, and burn incense and blow trumpets before you as you come up the stairs. The incense wouldn't be half a bad idea, on occasion!' And a rueful face defied his seriousness.

'Say, Miss Norway,' he smiled, 'we've had our little bit out of this—you and I—so

Sandra's going to meet that husband and daughter with the news.'

She did, too, for Alma as well as he, knew what this would be to Sandra.

They came up to Hospital again the earliest moment they dared, and as the big girl in her sunny print dress opened the door to meet them, the prairie wind in her hair, the eagerness in her action, and the gladness like that of the morning itself betrayed all this triumph of life and hope before they dared believe their eyes.

'Why yep!' she announced, 'they've done it! Mrs Moreland isn't going to die. She's took a turn and is now all on the mend. You've only got to ask them yourselves.'

Liston in the background came forward and confirmed the incredible tidings, but Miss Alma conscious of the dignity she had to support added little but the kindly common-places of the occasion. They must not hope for a moment to be allowed to see the patient. She would be frightfully weak for a long time to come.

Moreland squared his shoulders like an old soldier reporting for duty, and made an unforeseen offer.

'My dear,' he said, addressing first his daughter, 'we've heard enough for you to get off home now with an easy mind and look after your own affairs, and mine and ma's for us. If so be as this lady and Dr Liston will allow it, I'm going to stop right on here now by your mother till she gets well, and

put in the time working off the debt to the Hospital—not that such a debt ever could be worked off according to what they tell us of last night—but that it don't take half an eye to see there's a lot wanting doing round here which it would be a credit to a handy man to give his mind to.'

Alma Norway was pleased and surprised.

'Indeed there is, Mr Moreland,' she asseverated fervently, 'and I'd be almighty thankful to have you stop, but you'll never make your fortune here. We couldn't offer you more than twenty dollars for the month your wife will take to get strong again.'

'My dear young lady,' he returned with so genuine a courtesy it could scarcely be called studied, 'if I had ever expected to make my fortune it wouldn't be at this late hour. I have a letter here in my pocket,' he pulled it out, 'offering me four dollars fifty per day as engineer on a thrashing outfit for six weeks, but I'll be proud to serve you instead for whatever you find it convenient to offer. I only mention this here,' putting the letter back again, 'to make it clear I am likely to be of some use to you. Please command me in whatever way you will.'

'Father isn't drawing a long bow, Miss Norway,' Mrs Walton put in. 'He means what he says. And you'll find it out. He is a real handy man to have about the place; he can carpenter and paint and mend anything from a fiddle to a watch, and he'll do more for you, I'll lay, in a week than

anyone else you've had yet, by all accounts.'

Sandra signified this would also suit her in the kitchen, very well indeed.

'My!' she said, 'it's a shame the way that Robert'—referring to a recent casual helper—'neglected things. Mr Fane down at the Post Office would ha' let the Hospital have half a field of potatoes for the trouble of digging 'em, but Miss Norway wasn't told, so there wasn't no getting him to do it.'

The old man made an impatient gesture.

'I am eager to get to work,' he said, and the light in his grateful rugged face confirmed his readiness.

'Good for you, Mr Moreland.' Liston had hitherto kept silence but now he ratified the welcome agreement. 'Come out at the back here, then, and I'll show you. I want an incinerator here like those they had down at Emsdale——' and he showed rough details on a page of his notebook.

Moreland, it seemed, had served at one time under General Lew Wallace. He knew *Ben Hur* by heart, and incidentally all about the making of incinerators.

Miss Norway allotted to him a little room on the ground floor. He kept it scrupulously neatly, and in a very few days she had abundant reason to congratulate herself on having accepted his services. The old fellow was invaluable. Not only could he really do everything he claimed to be able to do, and to know how to do, but he did it

exceptionally well, and did not wait to be asked to do it. He saw what was wanted everywhere, and gloried in being helpful.

It transpired before long that he came of a certain very prominent family, and was related to a man looming large indeed in the public eye in a certain sphere of North American public life, but that family reasons of his own had relegated him to the obscurity and struggle of a homesteading life in the newer Canadian West. It was an instance of one of those odd encounters (common enough in new lands) with men whose sons or brothers or cousins are among the prominent, the prosperous, and even the great, on the highways of life elsewhere. Here was old Moreland, choreboy at the Finlay Hospital, whose name belonging to another man, had ranked among the crowned heads of the world!

CHAPTER XIII

THE DETERMINING FACTOR

SPORTS Day came and went without any untoward incident. As far as the Hospital was concerned the collection that was taken up enabled quite a few of the smaller outstanding accounts to be settled.

And then for awhile the harvest, and the consequent thrashers, occupied everybody's thoughts and every moment of daylight.

One farmer here and one there was reported to have begun cutting, and within a day or two every binder in the district was out. Round and round the far-flung 'patches' of grain they toiled, four straining horses abreast, as the arms of the cumbrous machine revolved like a paddle-wheel in a sea of wheat, leaving a broad mown swathe behind and a long line of golden sheaves hiccoughed out at intervals on the further side. The stokers spread themselves over the field, sheaf under this arm, sheaf under that, catching up and setting two others in position as they went, with practised rapidity and precision. Here a Scotchman piled his sheaves six abreast penthouse fashion, and you could tell his fields from his neighbours a long way off by the different style of the

stooks. The shorn and yellow prairie was stippled over far and wide with them, and for yet another ten days the heavy heads of grain bronzed in the sun, and the shining butts of straw dried out in the harvest heat. After that came the wains and waggons, the pitchforks and the pitchers, and the building stacks. Fair shaped groups of them, two, four, six, eight, rose in picturesque proximity to the huddled lines of the rest of the farm centre, and without a day's delay, fall ploughing began over the stripped acres. Broad bands of chocolate coloured earth, like velvet, bordered the thin primrose vesture of the tamed prairie lands, and on the quiet air came from every far direction the fussy sound of thrashing. With the coming of the fall and the first keen night frosts, whatever of vegetation still flourished in the farmers' 'gardens,' fell black and flaccid, with the morning sun. But the moment was passed when frost could do any harm to the crops, and a glorious bracing Indian summer set in, with high winds to toss away the straw from the thrashing engine like smoke from a steamer's funnel, and to winnow the heavy stream of gold gouting out elsewhere. The thrashing gangs, black as sweeps, worked like men whose coming and whose business is the great event of the year on every homestead; every few nights or so, well after dark, a prolonged hoarse blast from the engine followed down the wind by the sound of men's voices cheering as though at the end

of a bean-feast, announced to the interested neighbours for miles around that the gang was finished up at so-and-so's and would pull out at daybreak for the next place on the list. The farmer's wife here, congratulating herself that the rush in her kitchen was over, hastened off to lend the next one, faced with the same ordeal, a helping hand ; and everywhere the wheat and oats, their heaviness to the acre, their grade, and their likely prices now and in the spring, formed the one topic of interest and comparison.

Then, presently, waggons loaded up with grain began to crawl over every prairie trail converging upon Finlay, and the puffing of the elevator throbbed through all the waking hours of the day.

Despite its acknowledged triumphs, the Committee was getting tired of itself ; tired of the Hospital's problems and struggles. But with the onset of the winter it was confronted with the most insistent of the questions left over from the piecemeal building a year ago, and shelved during the summer months—the question of an adequate and permanent heating plant. Storm doors and windows too, were necessary, and a large supply of blankets. In face of the fact that by the end of September hardly a dollar remained in the Bank to the Hospital's credit, many soluble hearts turned to water.

It was scarcely to be wondered at that the Board was jaded, and that three or four

resignations had had to be made good during the past few months. The Hospital had proved itself a rather formidable proposition from the moment it was decided the same amount of roof would cover two storeys as economically as one ; just as a half section of homesteading country turns out rather more of a job than he contemplated to the farmer who argues the same amount of machinery suffices for both. An institution half its size, however, while it might have better suited experimental finances, would have demanded no more and no less of capability to manage matters on the part of the Committee.

Liston, too, was sick of begging.

He had written a couple of hundred letters, told the story afresh a couple of hundred times, pitched his appeal in a couple of hundred different keys until certain summarising sentences, and set phrases which foisted themselves handily upon him through sheer habit, made him feel the whole thing had gone, in his own mind, irremediably stale. The percentage of response had been good ; he had no quarrel with the philanthropic public. Instances of such generosity here and there and of such sustained interest from outside, occasionally cheered and encouraged him only in proportion as he grew more and more anxious the Hospital should show satisfactory results and the Committee, its sense of indebtedness. There were days, indeed, when he wrote such rubbish he dared not read it before he dropped the

letter in the mail box to take its chance, or waste the time it represented by tearing it up. There were days when the theme so palled upon him the words he wrote conveyed no sense to his brain. He strained his eyesight and wearied his head, driven not by a hobby, not by any 'pet charity,' but by a thing whose prey he had become lest it perish.

The only term he promised himself for this begging was the completion of the Hospital.

If the Sick Insurance plan could not be taken up widely enough to insure the minimum of income necessary for maintenance, the thing must go, like a house of cards, for he could not beg for ever! Equally strongly Liston felt he must scout the only alternative. And this, of course, was to attempt to charge patients at Finlay as they might have been charged elsewhere. The prairie folk could afford this only less than he could tolerate such an utter miscarriage of purpose and idea. Another man in his place, caring more for the medical benefit the thing represented than even for what might be unique about its prairie economics, would, perhaps reconsider the whole plan of its finances, and try to run it according to the ordinary scale of charges. For himself, Liston would rather see it fail for his aim had been to bring all that Hospital meant within the reach of the least prosperous of the settlers, not to burden them, in sickness, with preposterous debt!

Everything depended, of course, on the harvest.

Liston dropped his hot head in his hands and pressed his fingers to his aching eyes as he thought of it. The harvest—the hope, the dread, of the verdict on the harvest the elevator and the price of grain would soon pronounce—obsessed him. The Hospital, as indeed, the hamlet itself, and dozens of its fellows all over the district, would stand or fall by the price of wheat per bushel. It was a tricky thing, a throw in the game of vast chances far beyond his ken, for such vital issues, albeit little local ones, to depend upon so utterly.

He wondered feverishly what sort of a plea for the Hospital his very eyesight might be—supposing that plea would have to be made in official quarters. Philanthropic people had lost their vision writing letters for charities before now, but such a cost must always be an immense reproach to any source of public rescue. Was it necessary, even in these modern days, 'that one man die for the people?'

October came with all its flaunting red and gold of falling foliage in the prairie coppices, and then nothing remained of the willows and the leafless balsams but the scaffolding they made for an unimaginably beautiful fairyland when the winter dawn revealed every bluff and brake encrusted, starred and spangled over with the frozen white mists of the night. And daily, weekly, the financial situation grew more strained.

In his rounds about the country Liston kept the keenest eye open on all the signs of the times. He dropped in every now and

again on his old friend Gould, the Weed Inspector, but the man who had long ago foreseen that this was a ranching country rather than a grain-raising, would not admit that the bumper harvest then in progress affected his contention.

Rather, it confirmed the arguments, for there was a rumour prices bade fair to be ruinously low.

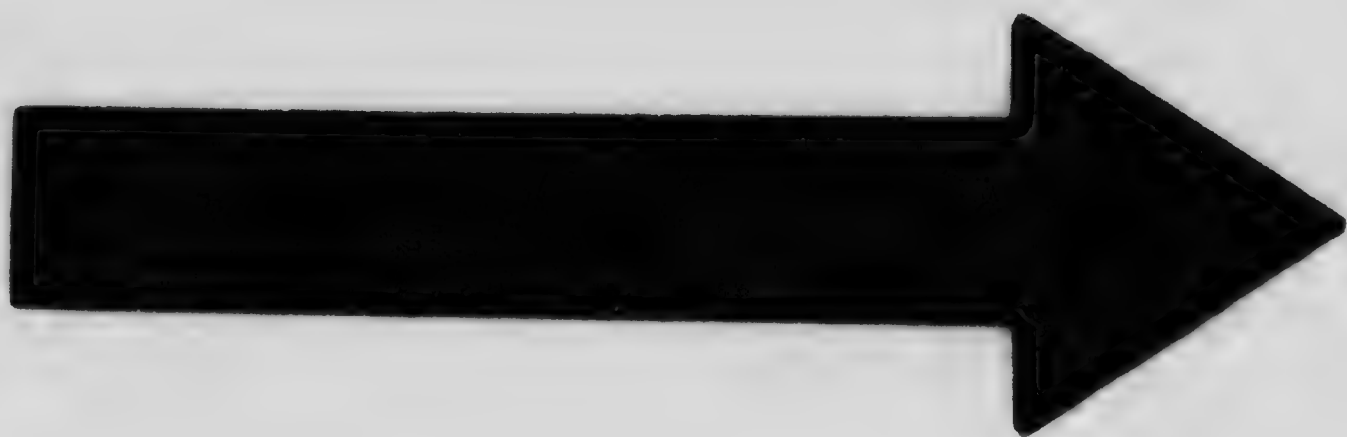
He was sitting out on the cold stubble field one afternoon drinking tea out of a can of the British workman type, in the intervals of trying to remedy a breakdown in the plough. One of the tie rods of the tongue had broken, been wrenched backwards, and was now deeply imbedded in the stubborn earth.

'There isn't a man,' he told Liston, 'who has hauled a load of grain to the elevator for the last three years, and jolted out again empty, who hasn't declared the proceeds of his sale weren't enough to pay the thrashing bill, and that he, for one, wouldn't see himself a long way first before he drove another furrow. And yet they've all gone on doing it. They've all gone on with the experiment.'

He threw out the remains of the tea, after a long pull at the can, and asked if by any chance the Doctor had a claw hammer with him.

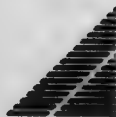
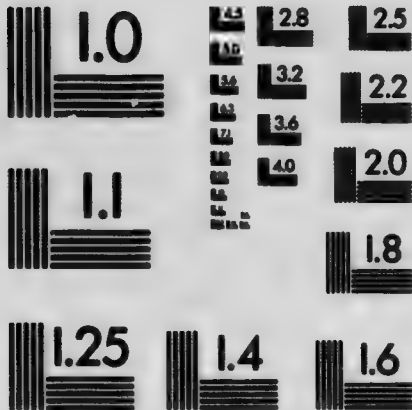
'Do you happen to know,' he added, 'what wheat's fetching now at the elevator?' and told him.

The hope that held on, or sprang perennial in George Liston's sturdy breast was not the



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will-o'-the-wisp hope of a man who has been dabbling in nothing but mistakes, calculating on nothing but good fortune, but rather the hope of the helmsman, who after a black night of stress, trusts for moderation in the weather by dawn. Just now, however, the strain was very long, and Gould's intelligence showed no gleam on the horizon.

You can figure it out for yourself,' he said. 'Here am I with two quarters it keeps me working like a nigger all through the summer to farm. I've got three thousand bushels of grain, fifteen hundred of wheat, and fifteen of oats. If the wheat, which isn't frosted, mind you, goes forty cents to the bushel I shall be surprised, and the oats about eighteen. That gives me about eight hundred dollars out of which I've got hired help, thrashers, machinery instalments, everything to pay. Do you think it's good enough yourself? And I'm a bachelor into the bargain. Fancy trying to keep a wife and children on it!'

'What makes you think it will go as low as all that?'

'Congestion of the traffic on the line; inability to move the crop and terminal elevators still choked with last year's stuff. Why,' the man laughed a little bitterly, 'grain will be cheaper to burn than coal and less trouble to fetch than wood, this winter! Oh, I tell you, Doc, cattle's the ticket for this country right enough. If it weren't that we're pretty sure to do away with herd law before long, you'd find half the fellers pulling up

stakes and quitting. Those little traders in Finlay are half bankrupt through bad debts. But it's worth their while to hold on now, as they have held on so long, and they know it.'

Liston had little to say. If all this were so the immediate prospect looked black enough. The silver edge to the clouds might be there, but in the storm meantime, the Hospital would probably be drowned. He got out of the buggy and lent the other a hand. For a few concentrated moments the two men devoted themselves to repairs, and it was in no very cheerful frame of mind the Doctor drove on presently to hold much the same conversation with one of the newly elected councillors for the Municipality.

Free range had been the chief plank in his platform on which Hepburn was elected.

He was confident that no finer country existed anywhere than that district for running cattle in the open all the year round; that, indeed, it would only come into its own once grain-growing was given up for ranching. If the newly organised Municipality declared for 'open,' instead of the 'herd' law which had hitherto obtained, with its system of fences and pounds and fines, the land would soon be restocked, and everyone find a safer footing.

'Forty cents a bushel!' he scouted Gould's quotation, 'more like thirty-five. I don't expect a cent above that for mine.'

He shredded some lump tobacco in his palm and stuffed a pipe. 'No one can

say wheat-raising hasn't been given a good trial hereabouts, nor that some of the best of it hasn't been grown right here in this district, but if what I say isn't correct, how are you going to account for it, Doctor, that it's only those fellows who have stuck to a few head of cattle ever know what it is to handle ready money?'

Hepburn was a burly fresh-faced man, whose ill-luck hitherto could by no manner of means ever have been ascribed to any fault of his own. He was a cordial-hearted farmer who pondered over other people's difficulties as well as those at home, and declared the wife's poultry run had been a better main-stay than the wheat.

He haled Liston in to see her now, and did what he could to lighten up the other's hard-drawn expression.

There was little doubt he guessed but that the Municipality would see its way towards making some sort of a grant towards the maintenance of that Hospital down in Finlay. If only the means might be forthcoming somehow of keeping it running until men beggared by grain had found their proper footing in cattle, success would be assured. The dairies at Edmonton already took all the cream the farmers could ship away and paid ready money in return: every fall the country was scoured by the would-be buyers of young stock.

'Very likely,' Liston returned, taking it all in, 'but a good year like this is enough

to encourage the grain growers as the seasons haven't encouraged them for quite a bit now.'

'Don't you think it,' Hepburn was confident, 'if the prices at the elevator aren't worth the fetching. It wants more than fine land and long seasons to make wheat-growing the proposition it should be: it wants cheap living, quick transportation, and good markets. Mixed farming is being generally preached all along the frontiers of the agricultural west now, for the simple reason that two strings to a bow are better than one especially when this is reliable and that is hazardous. And mixed farming here means just the step between grain-raising, and ranching pure and simple.'

George drove away presently in a mood of unrelieved foreboding.

He paid a couple of professional calls, one an unpremeditated visit, and then turned his horses' heads in haste towards the hamlet again. Passing Lanyon's shack he had noticed a dark blanket hanging from the window—the prairie bachelor's signal of distress—and found a young homesteader lying on a truckle bedstead in the agonies of appendicitis. Two or three hours afterwards Alma Norway had the new case committed to her charge. Liston was resolved to go on piling all cases that occurred into the Hospital, by way of defiance to its obviously pending fate. Lanyon hadn't a cent, he knew, but Lanyon would die in the shack.

CHAPTER XIV

FAILURE

THE last Committee meeting was a mere matter of form, and the upshot a foregone conclusion. Mackay was frankly sulky when summoned to it : while his habitual gentlemanliness did not desert Scott, a violent cold may have been partly responsible for his utter depression and helplessness. Mr Rogers was pressed for time and anxious to hurry over unpleasant proceedings. Mr Aldersey came prepared to do his duty at the cost of pain, perhaps, to Liston. No duty seemed clearer at this moment than that of disembarassing a body of responsibilities they had neither the power nor the enthusiasm to assume any longer. It was the Doctor's own fault that now, when the thing transcended him the rest of the Board had no resource.

The discussion lasted, however, some time, as this one or that made an attempt to consider alternatives.

George Liston felt throughout like a man who has tried perforce of a vice-like grip to weld a handful of dry sand into a ball. His wrist ached with the strain, while whatever

determination, optimism, and perseverance, success had ever induced in these men, was draining away like sand between his fingers now that the menace of failure was so near.

He blamed only himself, as with a wooden expression he listened half idly to the bat and ball of these last futilities.

There were good men enough and true on this Board, men like Aldersey and at least three others, who had not only seized his idea, but had done whatever lay with them, individually, to carry it out, but for the rest—they had the unwillingness of fear to be up and doing to save the hospital, the impotence of men who can afford no personal sacrifice for a common cause, the weariness of those whose interest had become stale and perfunctory perforce of difficulties.

And it all came back to this—the harvest had let them through again, hamlet, farmers, Hospital and all! Liston could discount the spirit of cowardice in the face of a fact like that. His Committee would have backed him up neither better nor worse than any other Committee, had not care lurking with every man, taken any collective spirit out of it!

The harvest had let them through without being in any sense a failure. The wheat was there, the golden guerdon of the strenuous year, untouched this time by frost or blight of any sort, and every man in the district should have had fresh heart put into him by a bumper crop. The harvest—from the outset the great negotiable factor, upon

which the fate of the whole countryside depended, had been almost a record one. The harvest, whose failure would have indemnified any Board for the closing of the Hospital, had been all publicity agents could desire.

But the little problem of this mushroom town, merged as it had been in the more momentous problem of the prairie nursing need, was swallowed up in a bigger problem than a bigger board than the Finlay Hospital Committee might handle! No less a problem, indeed, than that of an immense, congested, transcontinental freight traffic. The shortage of cars to move the crop, choked terminal elevators, the early closing of navigation on the lakes and rivers, resulted in a titanic jam of the western wheat. The crop, round about Finlay was all but unmarketable, and glutted.

Men with a run of ill-luck behind them like the Finlay farmers could not afford to hold their grain for a rise in price in the coming year, but sell they must for a beggarly few cents a bushel as soon as the stuff was thrashed.

Liston was without the plea even of his most inexpedient excuse! The Hospital was not in straits because the harvest had failed. The harvest was a record one—the prairie farmers should have been more prosperous than ever. Yet here were Finlay and that pioneer little institution on the hill threatened with extinction. An exodus had begun throughout the district. The hardware store

was closed, and three families had already left their farms.

The great causes which militated against the Hospital were utterly beyond the Doctor's ken. The thing had gone as far over his head as over the head of any man on the Board. To make the stand then, which his tenacity of purpose told him might be feasible had the bigger considerations of the work weighed with Duckworth, Scott, Mackay and the rest as they had weighed with him, would have been, possibly, to tide over the present crisis, but by no means to place Finlay Hospital beyond the jeopardy of circumstances national in their scope and danger.

Liston wondered, as he sat there almost heedless of the debate, if it had been as shortsighted of him to take as little interest in politics, as it had been of his Board to grasp none of the wider issues of possible success with their Hospital. The politics of East and West, of tariffs, of railroad: of federal and provincial government, all had a bearing from the farmer's point of view on this problem of the wheat, its sale, transportation and storage. The problem of the wheat was the problem, at bottom, on which the fabric of Canadian posterity was reared. That was the problem, ultimately, of every effort like this of his on the hill.

He passed a hand, wearily, over his forehead. It seemed the resolution was being put. . . .

This then was the end!

The bottom of the world *had* fallen out ; Liston wondered what remained to stand on. And all in an hour, too—though of course the thing had been imminent some time.

He found himsr'f taking the familiar trail up the hill. . . .

The prairie lay outspread around him, as all the everyday semblances of life persist around us, when someone lies dead. The meaning of those smiling contours, the soft blue hills in the sunny distance all powdered over with snow, was vanished. Nothing in the familiar prairie landscape had relevance, now, for the man whose work had crumbled down, leaving no monument but an empty house—which he reflected bitterly might now be called his 'Folly'—and the exhausting memory as of a dream that had not come true!

It crossed his mind how once he had thought the uttermost expense and the uttermost futility of human effort must be when a woman bears and rears a child, who, when he grows up to be a man is hung.

He felt like this about the Hospital.

It had not wound up with dignity and honour. It had collapsed on his hands with no appreciable excuse, with but the shortest record of usefulness behind it which might account to its benefactors for their gifts. A hundred cases since June—and none but Alma Norway and he knew what those hundred cases had meant!

A hundred cases since June—might indeed substantiate the contention which had

perhaps betrayed Liston's judgment by his zeal. Even so short a record as this sufficed to demonstrate that the Hospital had been a real and not an imaginary need in the district. Even then, none but he and the nurse knew how four or five at least of those cases must inevitably have died out on the homestead; how the details of one or two if published in a medical journal would make the reputation of the man in charge, and be as good to the nurse as a diploma of merit. A hundred cases nursed back to health and strength in nine beds under every sort of handicap should have been plea enough to save the Hospital. Yet it had collapsed like a house built upon sand. An ignominious end had come ignominiously, and what could his own attitude be now to all the world, beginning with Finlay itself but a colossal apology, a colossal owning up he had been fool enough to conceive what he had not been man of parts enough to carry out? From the word 'go' he had, indeed, been riding for this fall!

The Hospital had failed, and was to be closed the moment its last patient could leave. He glanced at it, and turned aside round the hill, walking away into the winter sunset.

The whole thing was over! Would it ever be done with? All the money, all that work, all that time and effort, those hopes of pioneering-visions gone up in smoke! The ridicule or the blame of it would not leave him untouched——

He thought of the censure of the Order,

whose prestige was, perhaps, involved, if not its judgment. But what was the censure of all the gravest Boards ever met together to ensure the proper spending of money they had not, personally, begged, to him—to Liston, who had begged twice, thrice as much again for Finlay, till the soles of his boots wore through and he almost went bare-foot. What was the censure of an Executive with vice-Regal patronage behind it, to him who had nothing to fall back upon but the savings that should have furnished a home for Sandra? The censure of his own heart was the censure which laid him in ruins.

Over and over again, tormented with a disappointment which physically choked him, and oppressed him like an unrealisable weight, Liston blamed himself for not exercising a foresight which is nothing more nor less than an attempt to forestall the bitter lessons of experience. He had never supposed that an enthusiasm backed up by a dogged power of work and self-devotion resolved to stop at nothing, would have served as well as the cheap prudence of men like Dr Farnworth, to lead him to nothing better than this impasse of doubt and failure! Over and over again he revolved the immediate cause of the crash. The Hospital had opened before it was ready, and pressing problems of maintenance had trodden on the heels of building expenditures, for which there was no adequate provision coming in. It had opened with far too little ready money in hand, and it ran for those few

months at a high pressure representing no sort of an average, which would have taxed the distribution of the year's income even had this been assured, as it was not, and as there seemed little likelihood it would be. The Insurance policy had failed, before any but Insurance cases applied for admission: sixty patients had been nursed at an ever increasing loss; a staff had been receiving salaries only justified by an income of \$3,000 before a third of the \$10 subscribers had come forward. From the day Liston had admitted Mrs Rainer to the Hospital, the undertaking had broken from his control in the matter of finances, and gathering momentum as cases crowded in, help had to be secured at any price, and a second Nurse could dictate her own terms, had rushed onward to the destruction of insolvency.

Had the Doctor ever really lost his head, met the risks and difficulties with any degree of indecision, faced the dilemmas with anything short of truth, worse complicated complications by a confused grasp of the issue, he might have given in now to the wretched indictment of incapability or weakness. As it was, only an aching sense possessed him, that given a thousand dollars ready money now, all the premises upon which the thing had been built might yet be justified. Given more time—given a helping hand from *somewhere*,—given a rise in the price of wheat, and the little ship would right herself, and yet sail true.

Aldersey had been right enough when he said that no hospital should look to constant benefactions for support, once the building fund was closed, and the problem had become that of local maintenance. But in this case the building fund had never closed. There was room and need yet for hundreds of dollars from outside.

Rogers had been right to veto an appeal to the Order, since in this matter of hospital subsidies, this was only concerned to plant, and not necessarily to foster the resultant shoot. Any frost might nip it in the bud after that.

And no one else save the Commissioner at Winnipeg, or here and there a philanthropist, cared particularly if the little prairie Hospital went under, if the pattern it should have set up was never copied. There was no legitimate, official, source of help in any direction. It could only triumph now at some immense individual cost neither he nor anyone in the district, was in any position to afford.

And so the Hospital had failed. The Committee had decided it should close the day the last patient left, and nothing remained to be said.

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He retraced his steps, going wearily, thinking now of Sandra only, wanting nothing but her. There were all sorts of evening 'chores' he had been accustomed to do up at the Hospital, chopping firewood, pumping water at such times when no one con-

descended to hold the cook and porter office. Old Mr Moreland did most of them now ; but there was always one excuse or another, if not any professional need, to take him up there again in the evening.

Would it not have been better, he speculated, to have married Sandra long ago, and let this vision of a work for humanity pass by ? It was no part of a doctor's business after all, to build a hospital. That was for the State or the philanthropist to do. Medical men were not necessarily humanitarians—indeed it would go hard with their house-keeping accounts if they failed to make of sickness, disease, and death, a means of livelihood. Even in those cases of self-devotion which roused the world's highest, justest, admiration, when a man renounced all else to fight leprosy or some other hideous disease in its own fell stronghold, it was science perhaps, rather than charity, prompted the sacrifice. Who indeed was he, a shabby 'general practitioner,' and a prairie one at that, to have set in abeyance for this wreckage of hopes, those humbler homely joys with which better men than he were satisfied every day ?

With the rebound of an intensely self-discounting nature when the strain has been too great, George Liston turned to the thought of the girl he loved, longing for the whole-souled indemnity she alone would have for him.

Sandra had never failed to give his work that share of her interest and solicitude

without which the love she bore him, personally, would have been disappointing. But now, when he wanted to forget it all, to put the whole strenuous business behind him, if only for an hour, her sympathy would be the only complete comfort he might find anywhere. She had been shrewd enough, as the least worldly-wise are yet dollar-shrewd in the West, to regard the risks and likelihoods involved in this hospital enterprise at least as level-headedly as Aldersey, whose loyalty to Liston himself, unlike her love, might have been a trifle undermined by the general pusillanimity of the committee. But she would be the only one, now, whose mind as well as her manner harboured no trace of criticism. Whatever her regrets would be for the Hospital, he knew what they would be for him.

A floating memory came back to him of his choir-boy days, and of a psalm he had never understood until now, even when advancing manhood had enlightened the crudest of his boyish ignorances.

‘Lord, I am not high-minded I have no proud looks.

I do not exercise myself in great matters : which are too high for me.

But I refrain my soul, and keep it low, like as a child that is weaned from his mother ; yea, my soul is even as a weaned child.’

All he wanted, all he had left now, was Sandra.

CHAPTER XV

THE LAST FARTHING

LISTON opened the door of the Hospital, and closed it again behind him softly.

The hall was warm and shadowy as evening crept on. A red glow came from underneath the heater. The davenport he had been engaged in repairing earlier in the day still stood up-ended where he had left it, although no trace remained of his litter of tools and string. This sofa was his out-patients' department and represented the waiting-room of the Hospital: its only drawback was that half the springs in the seat were sprung and wanted a lot of tying down. He glanced at his repairs now in passing, with the deliberate thoughtfulness never more characteristic of him than when other and more weighty things were on his mind. He pushed his hat on the back of his head, and squatted before the piece of furniture as men do when they examine the underworks of a thing, feeling a wire. Then thrusting his pipe into the baggy pocket of his coat, he rose and went on to the kitchen.

Sandra was standing near the table sewing by the light of a little lamp. She wore her

usual cotton dress cut square at the throat, and the light on her short hair and bare neck made her look boyish as ever. A tray crowded with cups of milk and cocoa to take upstairs when the wards were settling for the night stood ready for the summons of Miss Norway's little bell. The girl turned at the sound of Liston's footstep and looked up.

'That's good,' she said, and taking a comb out of her hair pushed it through the short rebellious masses with a characteristic gesture. 'We've been hoping you'd come up again to-night, George.'

He paused a moment without replying, then came and stood beside her and tossed his hat wearily down on the table.

'She give me the pattern,' Sandra said, showing her work and going on with it, 'but it looks awful little, don't you think—?'

For a moment or two his eyes rested on the thing in her hands, unseeing. Sandra's needle slipped against the thimble.

'Why should babies be bothered with sleeves,' he said, and leaned a temple against hers. 'You can never get their arms in anyway?'

'Oh yes, you can. You just put two fingers up the wrist and slip the little fist through with no trouble at all. Say—' she relinquished her stitching, and voiced the thought which had haunted her, employed upon it, 'this one's going to live—?'

A sigh escaped the doctor. He turned her round with her back to the light and

drew her beside him leaning against the table.

'It may. But we can't tell, Sandra. There isn't much likelihood.'

'All them others,' she protested, 'four, one after another, dead!'

'Hard lines—ay!' he murmured.

'Mrs Cresacre's that patient and quiet she never says a word, but she's been hoping it would make all the difference, this time, her being here, and if it don't, it'll break her heart.'

The set lines about his mouth dragged its corners in a way they had when Liston repressed a comment.

'Miss Norway's been saying if the Hospital done nothing else it would be worth all the bother to have things go the way they should this time. There isn't nothing she hasn't been doing to put the heart into her, but I'm that silly it just makes me cry.'

It was natural Sandra should attribute the worry in his face to this anxiety.

'You don't think things are going all wrong again, George, do you?' she asked.

He returned her scrutiny, but an evasion and a metaphor had to suffice for a reply.

'It depends what you mean by "all wrong,"' he said slowly. 'There must be a meaning in it, I suppose, even when children are born dead. So many are . . . and not only children . . . all sorts of things, Sandra, hopes, plans, projects. Which is better? That, or that they die a little later, when the

loss may be realised? When you've grown to love them as well?'

'You love them before then?' she said softly, and coloured under the freckles. 'You hope, and wait, and think of everything! It must be the worst kind of disappointment to wait so long, and go through so much at last—for nothing.'

'It is,' he agreed. 'It is!'

Sandra toyed with the little garment she had been making, and quietly swallowed the unbidden tears.

'Miss Norway's going to sit up with her to-night,' she said at last, with a change of manner, 'but she didn't ought to. She hasn't had an unbroken night ever since I come here.'

'There's no need,' Liston observed, 'I'll see her presently. You're fond of Miss Norway, aren't you, dearest?'

'Why! I should say! Everybody is. Them men upstairs is both in love with her,' and Sandra laughed.

'Hullo,' said George, 'she hasn't prevailed on you to go near Dick or Glover, has she?'

Only to fetch down a tray, it seemed, before the dumb waiter thing was fixed. But the way they were going on about the Nurse, the angel she was and that, Sandra had not minded afterwards how many trays she fetched from their ward.

'There isn't never a day but what some feller brings her stuff round to the door here, garden truck or chicken or moose or

something. And she laughs and just takes all she can get for the Hospital.'

'I knew you'd love her, Sandra. No one could help it who'd seen anything of what she has been to the patients and this place. That was one reason I wanted you to come.'

The girl put an arm round his neck a little shamefacedly, but lifted confident eyes to his, and said she had often thought so since. He had been quite right, she did love Alma Norway. She was a dear!

'There's no one good enough for you but her, and no one good enough for her but you, —don't it seem odd I've got you, George?'

'On a string,' he promised her and kissed her, 'but don't say such ridiculous things, dearest! What would Miss Norway think if she heard?'

'Oh, she'd laugh. She isn't one of the silly sort. She don't pretend to me as she thinks nothing of you. But her head's screwed on as right, as right.'

'It would take a lot, certainly, to turn it,' Liston agreed. 'I don't see anyone round here doing that in a hurry.'

'Well, she says about you much what you say about her, that these folks in Finlay don't know half of what you've been to the Hospital either. It was that I used to think—I knew you'd love her too, George.'

He was surprised into a laugh and conceded her point, scarcely aware Sandra could have turned the tables so neatly on him and so completely to her own innocent vindication.

'Everybody does,' he said; 'who could help it?'

'The women, too,' she added, 'we've enough jam put down for a month.'

'We have—eh? Then we won't eat it, here at anyrate. What would you say, Sandra, if Miss Norway was to leave us?'

'How's that? If Miss Norway was to leave us, George, you wouldn't get no one else just like her, and only she could run this place just now.'

'If Miss Norway went the Hospital would go too, Sandra, as you say. Or if the Hospital went she would go. Either way it comes to the same thing, doesn't it?'

The girl returned his look, alarmed at its seriousness.

'Why, you've no call to talk like that surely,' she said, 'not now—?'

Sandra's anticipation in many of Liston's anxieties had been rather lulled to a sense of security in the air of happiness and prosperity Alma Norway had known so well how to impart to the little institution under her charge. For weeks she had supposed things were getting on to some sort of a substantial footing at last. To find him reverting to the thought of failure filled her with concern.

'You've no call to talk of it's going, now!' she protested.

Liston took a turn about the kitchen.

'I have,' though, he said abruptly, stopping short, 'the Hospital is finished, Sandra. We've got to close it.'

'Close it,' she echoed, incredulous, 'you can't, George, with Mrs Cresacre——'

'Ay—close it! There's no more money to keep it going; the end was bound to come——'

'But Mrs Cresacre?'

'Oh, after that. As soon after as possible.'

'But there's others to come!'

'They'll have to stop where they are. People will just have to shift for themselves somehow, anyhow, as they did before.'

The blow left her dumbfounded. She stood and stared at the pale-faced, care-lined man standing there in the middle of the floor telling her in a short hopeless sort of way that this, then, was the end of it. Half-a-dozen practical difficulties sprang into her mind as the remonstrances, the arguments, the protests she had no words to put.

'You can't,' she faltered, 'you *can't* close it now.'

'The Committee have decided that they can and will. It was all thrashed out this afternoon.'

'How about them that's taken the tickets—how about them that's expecting to come in—?'

'I know,' he returned a little desperately, 'but I must fix all that somehow. I must take the tickets up instead of fees for a bit, until their value has been given.'

'My land!' cried the girl frightened at the vista of the endless cost to him, 'but how are you going to live, George?'

She went to him and laid a remonstrant hand on his arm, almost as though to recall his senses.

'Sandra!' he declared, 'how *have* I lived these past eighteen months but for you and your good mother and Mrs Maloney? I was fool enough to think the thing would have meant a home for you and me in the long run, but as it turns out, that is just as far away now as the time it will take me to start making money again and saving up.'

He put an arm about her remorsefully, and turned her bewildered face up to his.

'If you weren't you, my brave patient dear, there'd be nothing for it but that I should offer to release you, Sandra. But I told you once I should look to you only if the bottom of the world fell out. And it has. That's all.'

He let her go again, and resumed the aimless dreary tour of the kitchen pained to see so much of pain in her eyes. 'The ticket business doesn't amount to much anyway so you needn't bother about that. Half the promissory notes given are not worth the paper they're written on. That's one reason why we've got to close. We should be using that money now but so far as we're concerned it doesn't exist. The Committee want to wind things up before we get any further into debt—'

But Sandra heard little of these details. The voice that interrupted him was almost inaudible.

'Would a thousand dollars help any?' she

whispered as though forced to the query despite her will.

'A thousand dollars!'

He turned sharply on his heel, stung by the naming of such a sum at this moment of utter impotence.

'A thousand dollars! Why'—he turned on her as though she had been his unanimous committee—'as building fund laid out that would complete the place, light and all. As maintenance it would run us for four months—probably more like six. There's no more likelihood that a thousand dollars will drop down from Heaven to save this place, than that that poor woman upstairs will bear a living child. Forgive me, Sandra'—for she had sprung to him and closed her hand upon his mouth—'I'm not pitching into *you*, my dearest, but you know how this must make me feel. . .

'We've just got to see Mr Cresac through, and then the Hospital will be as dead as any child of hers. There's practically no hope of either.'

He caught the hand in his and held it, but there was no softening the hard truth of things and Sandra had to know. Her reply seemed wide enough of the mark.

'If that baby was to be born here alive, it would be another triumph for the Hospital wouldn't it, like Mrs Rainer's case?'

There was a curious ring of strained emotion in her voice, but Liston lapsed into weary spirit brokenness, and scarcely noticed it.

'Oh—who can say? It would be just due to the care and quiet she's had here perhaps. The place was built for that. I could have told you all this a week ago. If Miss Norway has her suspicions about the one or the other, the Hospital or the child, she has kept them to herself, of course. Life or death sometimes depend on a Nurse's carefulness.'

The baby's little shirt fell from Sandra's hand and lay unheeded on the floor. He gathered her to him and stroked her hair with a touch half pleading half remorseful.

'I've nothing left but you, my own sweet girl. It's all got to go by the board now, Hospital, babies, Nurses and all. Don't let's think any more about it. Or rather just think of it as Mrs Cresacre has to think of her dead children. That is just what this place has been—the product of long waiting (yours and mine) all but still-born. The bottom of the world has fallen out, as we once foresaw it might—do you remember? There must be some reason for it, dearest, but it's hard to see!'

All, thought Sandra, catching her breath like a sob, for want of that thousand dollars!

She turned away, and raising both hands above her head brought them down, linked, across her eyes like a bandage, in a strained despairing gesture. She halted a second, then dropped into the chair by the table and buried her face in the bend of her arm.

So all his work had come to naught, all

Alma Norway's was to be forfeited, and all these women like Mrs Cresacre and the rest were to be thrown back on the lonely prairie for want—Oh Heaven!—for want of the money it was in her power, unknown to Liston, in her power alone, to obtain.

The half-forgotten bribe of Ansell Carter blazed upon her memory. She had put the doubt, the fear, the thought of it right out of her mind, without once facing the possibility of the issue, which would force her as she was forced now, to remember! It had sprung up with Liston's every word and stared her close, like the lights of a blow, in the eyes.

'The day you ask me for a thousand dollars in the way I mean you to ask, you shall have it for his hospital.'

Sandra realised, then, Ansell had played on this chance. The bottom of his world had fallen out for the man she loved, and the fear that had touched her heart that day in the stable when he first used the expression and the bribe was fresh in her mind, suddenly contracted it. George had said he would rely on her when no one else could avail him anything, and her glad cry had been she would cut off her right hand for him.

Was she going to fail now?

The phrase about the bottom of the world falling out had borne such a secret and terrible significance of its own for Sandra ever after Carter had put such possibilities within her shrinking reach, that it seemed to her she must betray more than the love

in which he had used it, if she dared not remember her rough suitor's thousand dollars now. And she knew, after four or five weeks in Hospital, what she had not known that day in the stable, that to fail it would mean even more than to fail George.

She, Sandra Dunn, could redeem it all. She could do more. at this moment, than Alma Norway herself. She could give this doctor and this Nurse every life their united efforts might save in that house.

But the price was the price of her womanhood, the price of love and of life.

It was Ansell Carter's thousand dollars

A thousand dollars meant no more and no less to the Committee with no idea where to look for such a sum, than the unattainable. To Liston it meant at least temporary salvation. To any well-found, well-backed administrative body it meant no more than the scratching of a pen upon a cheque.

But to Sandra it meant all within her which loved must unimaginably suffer, all which flinched and trembled and recoiled, must submit.

The realisation of it overwhelmed her for the moment, utterly.

Liston raised her with expostulations loving and contrite, but her eyes were dry and burning.

'No fear,' she said hoarsely, almost repulsing him, 'I wouldn't be making a fuss. Let me be a minute, that's all. It was only something came into my head.'

She took out her comb again and forced it through her hair.

'Never you mind me. There's things I want to see to——'

A light footfall sounded in the room beyond as Sandra dragged the tray of cups towards her. Alma Norway came through the swing door sweet and dainty but a trifle grave. She thought she had heard the doctor's voice and would be glad to see him upstairs. Mrs Cresacre was—not so well.

'Don't be scared, Sandra,' she said, and picked up the little shirt, 'but keep lots of water in the kettle, *boiling*, there's a dear. I may be able to let you go to bed if the Doctor stops'

Liston retreated a step, glanced again at Sandra, and without a word, left immediately for the ward. The little Nurse followed, and the door swung to again.

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She faced the thought, then, alone.

The little lamp burnt brightly; nothing but the faint comfortable noises of the fire broke the stillness in the big bare kitchen. The night darkened outside the blue squares of the uncurtained windows and there was a cold radiance on the snow.

One pale star shone in upon the anguish of two women.

She lay prone across the table. An immense numbness seemed to have descended on her brain. All that had ever

been immature about Liston's sweet 'goose-girl' dropped away from a woman in the throes of an immeasurable sacrifice. Somewhere in her heart there was a lonely senseless wailing, she knew as in a dream, to be her own, but which distracted her from something she dreaded yet longed to hear in the midst of the tense momentous silence of the house and of her will. The vigil Sandra and the star were keeping waited for a resolution, and a birth.

A life for a life upstairs, and a life for many lives in the lonely room below.

The star waxed brighter as the night deepened, watching a double travail as the hours wore on.

. . . . She remembered there were other mothers waiting. Was she going to shut the door of George's Hospital no less in their faces than in his own? If she could not bear to remember Carter's money now, whatever suffering went untended after this place was closed, would be her reproach.

Unwilling indeed to imagine the result between the two men, Sandra had never breathed a word to Liston of the farmer's bribe. The wild thankfulness for this which overwhelmed her, as she thought of it, made her realise she would do the thing he had played for.

Her will however, terrified, clung to some sort of an immediate proviso.

She would do this thing *if the little child to be born that night might come into the world alive.*

The face she had raised a moment to the cold blue night and the watching star—raised in a moment of half mystic, half heroic resolve—buried itself again on her arm in very human despair.

To have told him would have frustrated this power, frustrated that thousand dollars. It would have condemned her to idle on-looking when the bottom of his world fell out. He might, indeed, have relied on her for more than he meant or knew. To have relied on her for salvation—was not that to have relied on her for love.

But her will struggled like a snared bird. Could it be possible she must sell herself and break his heart? Could it be possible that there were none who could save the Hospital if they would? George had said that the Committee had considered every way; that a thousand dollars was too much to expect from any one source; that they had no right to hope the Nursing Order would provide it; that it would take too long to beg.

But passionately the girl remembered a thousand dollars would be the price of her body and soul.

Were there, indeed, no sources whence help might be demanded to spare such ultimate personal sacrifice? Was there no government assistance for a place like Finlay which only failed to support so necessary an institution as this little prairie Hospital because of circumstances over

which it had no control? Was there no official recognition, for a piece of public work undertaken on the private initiative of a man who must now go under for want of means to carry it on, after all of his own were exhausted?

The little Matron, Sandra remembered, had stood beside that very table a day or so before, reading in the paper how two millionaire society women in one of the rich eastern American cities, had vied with each other to see who could spend the most on a dinner, thousands and thousands of dollars.

Would either of these women, she demanded fiercely, give George a thousand dollars for Finlay—for the asking? Didn't it go without saying that there would be a lot behind such a demand as that; that someone was paying, if not with dollar bills any longer, because they had none, with health and strength and time and eyesight, with personal sacrifice of every sort, as George had done? With anxiety and work and tears, if not with love and life itself as she must do! Should not a Hospital and difficulties be plea enough of itself, for people with money to burn?

A daring light came into her feverish eyes. If she—Sandra—only knew *who* they were, *where* they were, and how to get at them, if she had so much as the price of the railroad fare, shy and awkward and 'silly' as she was, she would set off that night to ask anyone

with money to put up a thousand dollars for the Finlay Hospital!

Her head dropped on her arm again. Of course, they'd refuse! They'd refuse, and '*know not what they had done.*' . . .

Her imagination scarcely toyed with the futility, but roved over the whole field of its suffering.

There was nothing for it but that she should go to Carter as soon as possible and remind him of his promise. There was nothing for it but that George must think of her whatever would quickest heal his hurt.

Sandra could not but know that the loss of her to Liston would overtop and outclass every sacrifice voluntary or incidental he had yet made for his work; she hoped it would strike him, first, as an amazing perfidy. It was best so. She would rather have him 'mad' than broken-hearted. If she did this thing at all would it not be right that an end, even such an end, should be put to the Doctor's love for her? If he were to think of her as no better than the bad women who sold themselves for money, he might be able to forget her sooner. He had said, that night, he would have no home to offer her for all the time it would take to recover from this failure: he knew that Carter was comparatively rich . . . He would only understand when the bank or the Committee got the money (—it would never do to send it him direct—) what for she had married

Ansell; he would know then, it was love itself had made her yield.

The tears swam down her face and fell in big drops upon the table.

The issue dictated itself.

The issue either for him or her was not just that of their own happiness, but one of life and death, big as the purpose he had conceived two years ago, fraught with far-reaching consequences. Liston had taught Sandra too well. Idealistic men should never urge their idealism on unselfish women whose love they win, for in the long run it may outsoar their own, and leave the whitest passion bleeding red.

As the wife of the man she loved, what little life would Sandra bring into the world and not find it a living reminder that this other child of his had been allowed to fail and die for want of the sustenance, that she alone could bring to it, for want of Carter's money? Her own joy and fulfilment would be purchased at the cost of every unnursed mother in the district, of every maimed or sick untended man.

A mind less noble than Sandra's would not have conceived the alternative. Perhaps the girl herself would scarcely have struggled with it had the little wards of the Hospital housed only men. But Mrs Cresacre's case made an irresistible appeal of its own to every tender susceptibility in her. That Liston had used the metaphor of this poor mother's possibly fruitless ordeal in speaking

of the failure of his enterprise weighed heavily in the scale with Carter's dollars. The thing was to him what a child might be to a woman—and truly, Sandra herself, must play a mother's part to it! Her sympathies, quick and very real, could never be stirred as they had been in the Hospital, to no practical purpose. Her shy almost boy-like adoration of Alma Norway was based on an immense conception of what a Nurse could do for the sick, an envy of such opportunities for sacrifice and service. . . .

It was inevitable she should do this thing. The battle was virtually over.

A strange sense of quiescence came upon her as she waited for the acceptance of her sacrifice. . . .

A diaphanous suggestion of comfort distilled itself out of the very anguish which made her hope George would forget. A thought born of their little jest that evening, and of every faint fear of a jealousy in her heart which had dissipated like mist before the sun as she came to love Alma, skimmed over the depths of Sandra's mind, as the wing of a silent wheeling bird just touches the waters of a brooding lake, leaving nothing but a tremble to show where the tip touched the surface, and is gone.

Whatever the little Nurse might be in the future to this house—and to George himself,—neither he nor she would forget that Sandra had made it possible.

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Suddenly something broke the death-like silence. The weirdest little noise!

Then it came again—

A cry! And the lusty wailing of a newborn baby echoed through the roomy house, thrilling to the marrow the girl who waited for the sign that should accept her sacrifice.

CHAPTER XVI

POETIC JUSTICE

LISTON remained at the Hospital all night, taking it turn and turn about with the Nurse to stand watch over the fluttering life of the new-made mother. There was a little camp bedstead on the upper landing, reserved for his use in emergencies like this. And just as the day was breaking the worn, exhausted woman fell into a deep refreshing sleep.

He stood by the door that was to have led, one day, to a balcony, and watched the dawn over the subdued contours of the limitless prairie etched in white against the tender greys and mauves of the retreating night.

Heralded by a rosy blush before whose coming the virginal stars withdrew one by one, the sun appeared at last like a burst of happiness, a burnished golden rim below the ever brightening glory on the far eastern horizon. His fan-like rays of splendour trembled, then shot straight and strong athwart the smiling heavens attaining nearer and nearer to the very zenith as the glorious orb silently, majestically mounted. An

immense concentric arch of light, brighter even than the glowing eastern sky, banded the shafts of new-born radiance like the tissues of the fan. . . .

The infinitely great and the infinitely small! Which was which?

That sun had risen over these northern plains of the last lone land, as over every region of the round world, the teeming ancient countries and the torrid zones, ever since the dawn of terrestrial time itself. The things of the long human day from Adam to now, were dwarfed to incomparable insignificance, in the aloof ageless, miracle of the morning glory. What was failure or success, six months or six centuries in the light of dawn which had seen every brief episode of race and empire, dynasty and human cycle come and go, in turn? Only the crying of the new-born child and the soft voice of a woman soothing it, threw the challenge into the heart of the sunrise. Which miracle of the two was the infinite, the greater?

The man withdrew his meditative gaze, and lay down on the little tumbled couch with a sigh. His eyelids felt as though full of hot, stinging sand.

When, later, he joined the Matron in the dining-room for breakfast, the neatly laid deal table and the kettle steaming away like mad on the cheerful kitchen fire next door, promised a good meal. Miss Norway coming and going, fresh as the dawn itself in her delicious grey and white, with crisp

toast in the rack and the tea caddy under one pretty elbow, explained that Sandra had run down to the post-office for the mail, and guessed they wouldn't have long to wait.

'Suppose you time the eggs,' she said. 'I wonder if I can trust you to do that?'

It was a phrase he invariably used in turning over to her the odds and ends of surgical jobs he should have seen to himself. 'I do believe you'll get me to do your operations next,' she protested one day, secretly flattered at his confidence in her, and Liston had replied more dryly and more seriously than ever, 'Why not, Miss Norway?'

The door opened, and Sandra struggled to close it against the wind. The glorious early-winter morning had erased all traces of late hours and mental crises on a face unaccustomed to them. She had a pile of envelopes in her hand. There was a deeper look than ever in the shy brown eyes, like a beautiful dog's with lights of gold and purple in them, though neither Alma nor Liston had anything but commonplaces to remark, just then, about the event of the night upstairs. Before each other they met her interest with correctly professional reserve.

A letter from home, and one of particular interest apparently from across the line, engrossed the Matron: Liston thrust out a lower lip over a couple of bills, an invoice, and a firm's regret at not being able further to extend the time limit of their account.

'Say — you two,' Sandra remarked, no

more abruptly than usual, 'can I go up to Mooseberry to-day?' She was busily frying bacon.

Never before had she asked to go anywhere. Alma looked across at her in astonishment.

'Gee! what's in the wind at Mooseberry?' she exclaimed. 'Why, Sandra, I wish you would. You stay around much too much. And you could fetch me those inhalers—' she doubled up comically and shot a glance at Liston, 'but what about the petty cash? I have exactly five cents left.'

George put his hand in his pocket dubiously.

'I'm not wanting money,' Sandra said, flushing, 'I've got quite enough for that.'

'How much is it,' he reflected, 'return first? You mustn't come back by the night train, Sandra. You must stop at the Hanover.'

'Well, I've got enough,' she protested, 'Ma don't keep me that short.'

'The Hospital would be owing you quite a bit, Sandra, if only you'd take it,' Alma remarked, 'why you should do all you are doing here for nothing just because of the Doctor, I don't see. It's letting the Committee take too much for granted. I don't like it.'

'As long as Sandra does it for nothing there won't be any kick coming from that direction,' the Doctor observed, reserving to himself the comment that the Committee would find themselves more up a tree than ever confronted with any claims of his fiancée's, now.

The girl said nothing, but grew hotter in the face frying the bacon. There would be no question whence her expenses and her return fare would be forthcoming. The boiling fat spat in her face, making the tears start in her eyes.

Down at the Post-Office she had learned that Ansell Carter had hauled a load of grain to Mooseberry only the day before, to be ground at the mills there. She was in a fever to see and speak to him without delay. That would be the best place to meet—the only way. She longed to get out of Liston's reach.

The west-bound train went through at mid-day, and less than an hour's run brought it to Mooseberry, the divisional point, a straggling growing place of some two thousand inhabitants. When the little Hospital had first been projected Liston had written to the Secretary of the Board of Trade there proffering the accomodation of its wards to the Mooseberry folk, if they cared to take some interest in its progress, until such time as that town might see its way to a Hospital of its own. He certainly counted on the section men on the line there appreciating the ten dollar ticket plan. As a matter of fact Glover, one of the patients at this moment, came from there. He had had two fingers amputated. The local paper had spoken appreciatively of the effort; it was a Mooseberry lawyer who had given Liston advice gratis now and again on a legal point

or two with regard to getting the Hospital incorporated, and here and there one or two Mooseberry people had done generous things for the Finlay Hospital. But beyond this Mooseberry had shown the usual spirit of aloofness.

When Sandra Dunn stepped off the cars, and made her way across to the Hanover Hotel, she became aware that something a little unusual was going forward. There were quite a number of people about, and the sidewalk outside the Hanover was livelier than ordinary. It seemed that a Special had recently brought a knot of men to the place for a much advertised municipal meeting. Mooseberry had got growing pains, and was suffering from a self-induced attack of swelled head. A good many Real-Estate men, one or two politicals, and an extremely prominent figure in government circles, had honoured the occasion by their presence.

It conveyed nothing to Sandra. She had made up her mind to find the man she most dreaded to meet in all her circumscribed world, and to tell him she wanted the thousand dollars he had offered her. How she was to go back to the Hospital again—if Ansell, indeed, allowed her to go back, she did not know, nor how or when she must see Liston for the last time. She had parted with him in her heart last night: perhaps the actual parting, prosaic like most of the real tragedies of life, had taken place by the very fact of this little journey. He had gone down

to his office in the village after breakfast, and she had not seen him afterwards.

Groups of men stood or sat about the rotunda of the Hotel, smoking, turning over the local news sheets, or talking. It was an ordeal to Sandra to go up to the bureau and proffer an enquiry for Ansell Carter to the business-like woman, erect and capable, who stood behind it, chatting across it with a lounging man. Mrs Anscombe gave her a cold but not unkindly glance.

'Mr Carter of Finlay?' she said, turning a leaf of the register, 'no, he isn't here. But he's in town I know, Miss Dunn, for he came in last night and made an appointment with someone else for six o'clock, in the dining-room. If you wanted to wait there's a sitting-room upstairs.'

The Proprietress was one of those women who made a point of 'placing' at once every unfamiliar face that came in. Sandra was not a difficult figure to identify. She lifted her eyes from the book and surveyed her with that trace of satisfaction a well-preserved, well-habited woman may feel who still knows how to attract, confronted with countrified beauty which has not begun to learn the art. Turning to the man again, her spell, though, was broken.

'Excuse me—' he said, pinching up his soft hat to the girl, 'but I seem to remember your face? Er—were you not the young lady who made a collection at Finlay down the line here, from the business men's

Special last winter? I can scarcely be mistaken—'

His admiration was patent to Mrs Anscombe if not to Sandra, but there was nothing the girl might resent either in it or his manner. She coloured at being spoken to by the stranger. How was she to remember any of those men again, even supposing she had looked at a single one of them at the time?

'I am—I did—' she murmured, 'it was for the Hospital.' And an agony of bashfulness gave her tone a suggestion of defiance.

'Yes, I recollect. Well, how goes the Hospital, is it built yet?'

'Built!' she echoed, 'I should say!'

'That's good. I was awfully interested you know—' 'I have so often wondered,' he went on conversationally, 'if the idea came to anything, but have never been down that way since to find out.'

Mrs Anscombe looked on impartially, as one who has heard a good deal about the subject under discussion, but reserves a judgment. Something in Sandra's exclamation struck her as unusual.

'It's been running some time now, hasn't it?' she put in calmly, 'I believe a case went from here only a week ago.'

'Since March,' Sandra returned.

'It's quite handy for the section men,' the Proprietress observed, 'there's quite a bunch of them here and they're always

having one sort of mishap or another. It's high time we had a Hospital in Mooseberry.' A thought occurred to Sandra. Over and over again Glover had told Miss Norway she ought to 'get after' the gang of railway workers at Mooseberry, and rope them all in as subscribers.

'Where does the Section Boss live?' she asked faintly. To be told, and to have to act on the suggestion nothing but the desperation of affairs at Finlay would have put into her mind, took the strength out of her knees.

'Oh, over there,' said Mrs Anscombe carelessly, nodding in the direction of the Depot, 'just across the line.'

But the man with the soft hat had no intention of seeing this conversation cut short. He watched the colour ebb and flow in this extraordinarily arresting face, and wondered why the girl palpitated with emotion. Robert Liscard was as straight a fellow as ever stepped, but with him the sheer joy of talking to a beautiful woman never gave way without a struggle to his sense of the privilege.

'How many Nurses have you got?' he enquired, wondering how a girl with a face, and eyes and lips like that could be unaware that he, or any man must want to talk to her.

'Just two,' she said. Her expression kindling, then melting, piqued his interest still further. 'And the Matron's that fine!

The place isn't half good enough for her, the way it is now.'

'I should be delighted to hear a little about it all,' he said abandoning his easy attitude against the bureau, 'if you would be so good—? My name is Liscard: I had the pleasure of making a small contribution to your fund that day Miss—Miss—?'

'This is Miss Dunn,' proffered the Proprietress as Sandra hesitated. She was a good-natured woman. 'Mr Liscard is with Mr Hickman's party here, Miss Dunn. You are fortunate if he is interested in your Hospital at Finlay.'

Held to the spot first by lack of address to extricate herself from the incipient conversation, now fantastic hope gripped at Sandra's heart like a vice and hurt her. She looked from the one to the other, from the self-possessed face of the woman of the world who regarded her so impersonally, to the very live features of the black-haired gentlemanly Liscard.

'Oh—' she breathed, 'I'd be so glad to tell you if I could! It's cost so much—'

He laughed. 'I've no doubt of that—' glancing without regret at the tip of his cigarette which had gone out, 'Hospital always do. I've never heard of one yet which wasn't more or less in difficulties. But I suppose you have all the local support you expected in Finlay and the district? Doesn't this place help any? It ought to join hands with you and avail itself of the benefit.'

The girl took a long breath to ease a compound of such sudden half-grasped hope and acute apprehension, it could but issue in some rank temerity.

'We need such a lot still,' she burst out, 'a thousand dollars, Mr Liscard! Oh say—do you know where I could get that lot of money—or anyone who'd give it? You don't know, nobody knows, what that would mean . . . Mrs Anscombe said I should be fortunate to interest you . . . have *you* got a thousand dollars, Mr Liscard?

She stared at him, her lips slightly parted and her eyes burning bright, as though Heaven or Hell depended on his answer. Her utter artlessness if not her desperation made its own appeal.

Something inside seemed to turn head-over-heels with the Real-Estate man. Had *he* got a thousand dollars!

'Why—that's a big sum, Miss Dunn,' he fenced. 'I thought you said the Hospital was finished and open now, and housing patients?'

'So it is,' she cried, 'but it's to be shut up—We can't take in more. There isn't any money to go on with.'

She was trembling violently from head to foot, and it needed much less penetration than Bob Liscard possessed to see she was the prey of some violent agitation or fear. Mrs Anscombe, also, was taken by surprise. She glanced at the man, and her glance went on to the vacant seats about the room.

He took her meaning.

'Isn't there any less public place where we could have a chat?' he suggested, 'Miss Dunn seems upset. How would you care—' turning to Sandra, 'to sit upstairs while you are waiting? Perhaps you could tell me something of the trouble there? Pray, pray don't be distressed!'

'Oh—anywhere,' she stammered, 'do let me tell you, if I can—I never imagined this!'

She turned aside raging with herself for having to fight 'silliness' as well as tears at an undreamed-of moment when she would have given all she possessed to be able to marshal momentous and telling pleas.

Mrs Anscombe came round from behind the bureau. There was such a tragic strain in Sandra's face, the Proprietress could scarcely credit it, and her curious behaviour, to mere worry about a Hospital's money matters although she knew the girl was to marry the Finlay doctor. This thousand dollar business sounded tottery, but whatever interest Mr Liscard might take in the place—or far more likely in the beautiful creature herself, (what man wouldn't?)—he was not the one to part with his money easily or rashly. Of that she felt sure. It did not escape her shrewd sense that Sandra was no hand at begging. And she was too innocent or in too much downright trouble to make capital out of the interest she had so evidently inspired.

'You know where the room is, Mr Liscard,'

taking the girl and pointing her to the stairs, 'just round at the top. It is quite quiet up there except for anybody who may be at the writing-tables. Shall I let Mr Carter know, when he comes, that you have enquired for him, Miss Dunn, and are waiting?'

Sandra's hand flew out against the wall for support. 'I don't know,' she returned bewilderedly, 'I don't know, Mrs Anscombe. Don't say anything, please, till I come down.'

The man paused a moment.

'Oh confound it!' he remembered, 'the dining-room's closed. Couldn't you have a glass of milk or something sent up—I dare-say Miss Dunn could do with that, or a cup of tea perhaps?'

'No, no, no,' she prayed him, 'I don't want anything, Mr Liscard—!'

'Only that thousand dollars, eh? They seem to be terribly on your mind,' following her up the short flight. 'But surely there's no occasion for a lady to worry about a matter of that sort as you seem to be doing, Miss Dunn? Allow me—'

He lifted the curtain for her that draped a doorway.

'—Ah, this is better. We can talk here quite well.'

He glanced at a man seated at one of the writing-tables there, and indicated a chair for Sandra by the window.

'Hope we don't disturb you, Mr Hickman?'

The other looked up preoccupied and short.

‘Not at all—not at all—’

Liscard pulled a seat forward for himself, and sat down before her, delighted with the chance of a tête-a-tête.

‘I should like to know the whole story,’ he said, hoping to encourage her to self-mastery enough to tell it, or, anyway, to talk to him. ‘You made quite an impression that day, you know, on the entire bunch of us. I knew you again directly. There were some thought Finlay a bit ambitious to think of building a Hospital when a town like this for instance, hasn’t found the money or the enterprise to put one up yet, but that was its own look-out. Of course,’ inviting her confidence, ‘difficulties were a foregone conclusion.’

Sandra nerved herself to an immense effort. Had it not been for the fur cap with the crimson swathe of silk in it Alma had insisted matched her lips, she would have grabbed her comb as she always did when bracing herself to a task and torn it through the rich masses of hair banked on her brow. This gentleman looked ‘that kindly’ at her, anyway.

She stripped off her gloves instead, and grasped both arms of the rocking-chair.

‘It’s a fright, the money we want,’ she said, ‘it’s that I come here about to-day.’

‘To borrow, Miss Dunn?’ scenting a woman’s financial indiscretion on the eve of perpetration.

'To borrow?' she repeated, puzzled. 'Do you mean a person could borrow a thousand dollars——?'

It hadn't been that then! The man, in his turn was mystified.

'Oh, with proper security for it, yes, I suppose so. But how is it this business devolves upon you? Forgive me saying it—I scarcely think you are quite equal to it. I should have thought the Board, or the Secretary——'

'What "security"?' asked Sandra, breathlessly, 'what is security? Could I *borrow* a sum like that?'

'I should imagine not,' he returned, aimably, hitching his chair a trifle nearer, so earnest she seemed. 'It would mean you would have to offer a satisfactory guarantee that the money would be refunded within a certain reasonable time, with the interest due, or at least that interest on the loan would be forthcoming all right until such time, as the capital was all paid off. A matter of a thousand dollars takes some negotiating you know. There are ways of arranging it——'

'Mr Liscard! Couldn't I borrow a thousand dollars and work until I paid it off? There isn't anything I wouldn't do. I'm real strong too. I don't care how long it would take, if it was all the rest of my life. There must be lots of places for hired girls in Edmonton, or maybe Mrs Anscombe would take me here in the dining-room, if you were to ask her?'

She was feverishly eager, and her hands strained on the chair.

'Chut!' he scouted the notion. 'Why should you even think of such a course? I don't understand, Miss Dunn.'

'Oh, there isn't no "security" but my hands,' she said, 'it's me that's asking the loan, not the Hospital. I'd pay it back somehow, sometime——'

'I really don't understand—'

'No, no, no, of course not, Nobody would. And I can't explain . . . But Mr Liscard, if there's any way of getting that money, tell me how to do it. If you've got it, wouldn't your wife have me as a servant for nothing—ever after—?'

'My dear Miss Dunn! I'm not in a position, fortunately, to let you dream of such a thing. I am a bachelor and keep no sort of an establishment you might grace in any capacity—' if a thought quickened Liscard's pulses for one ungoverned minute it passed through a mind to which it was naturally alien.

'Surely,' he added, rallying her, 'you would not throw yourself and your life—or a big slice out of it—away like that merely for the sake of straightening out the affairs of an institution?'

Sandra, in her ignorance and trouble, went full tilt on to the rocks.

'I'll throw myself away for a thousand dollars much worse than that,' she said, and her tense, despairing voice showed Liscard

he was indeed, in the presence of some tragedy, though it was inevitable he should misconstrue her meaning. In spite of himself the hand he put out would have closed suddenly on hers, a hot tight grip, but that Liston's little ring shone there, on her third finger.

'What is that?' he caught himself saying. 'Isn't there anyone to prevent you—throwing yourself away?'

She looked at him without any comprehension.

'You don't know what I mean,' she said, wearily, hope dying fast within her, 'and I couldn't tell you. I thought perhaps you'd give me the money . . . It was silly . . . How should anybody give a thousand dollars to a stranger, even if they had it, like those women, to burn!'

'No,' he returned, pulling himself up roughly, 'people don't give big sums away like that for nothing. You forget, you haven't told me, how the Hospital comes to be in such straits; how it happens you've got to find the money; and what anybody else is doing in the matter. What has the Doctor got to say about it for instance? You've got a Doctor I suppose?'

She went white, and fell back, relaxed, in the chair. 'Does he know of this strange quest of yours?'

Sandra remonstrated. 'He mustn't,' she said. 'It's only him would prevent me throwing myself away. It's for his sake I

want to do it. We was to have been married. We might be even now if I could find that thousand dollars.'

Liscard was growing almost irritable with the puzzle of the thing. The girl's pallor, her rising tears, her intrinsic honesty shamed him, forcing him to focus his attention on her difficulty more seriously than he had done yet. This was quite a new aspect of the matter.

'I don't pretend to understand the situation,' he said, straightening himself with a jerk of annoyance, 'but it seems to me there is nothing for it but to get out a big subscription appeal. I could help you there, I've no doubt.'

He got up and crossed to the writing-table where the other man remained engrossed with pen and ink. He leant beside him, both hands firmly planted on one of the blotting pads, and exchanged a few explanations.

'It seems to be a matter of some local importance, Hickman, and this young lady is in quite a taking about it. I wish you'd give us a moment.'

Mr Walter Hickman, an important figure in Government circles was a tall spare man, none too fastidiously dressed, with a keen face, to which formidable bristling brows, iron grey like the moustache, and eyes whose scrutiny no lame proposition might stand, imparted a decided look of fierceness. Oddly enough, nothing in his appearance gave a hint of the humour he

possessed, and mightily appreciated. Nor of a penetrative sympathy to be bespoken not by one here and one there, as an introduction, or a penchant of his own, might dictate, but at the beck rather of any real cause on its own merits. No man in the West knew better than he what might be the real causes to which its ever rising tide of population, its exploitation, its unequal prosperities, and its illimitable possibilities were daily, yearly, giving rise. In a crowd of men Hickman would be, perhaps, the last one to whom an appeal might be addressed, and yet curiously, the likeliest by whom it would be received. Liscard felt he had only to detach the other's mind from his correspondence to obtain a hearing for the Finlay business.

Hickman was approachable to everyone as men are approachable in the West, no matter how high-sounding their position, since whatever that position, it had been won through experiences and efforts, the common lot of those who opened up new regions, as young men, with packs on their backs; then found themselves building up new nations with the toil of their own hands; and were latterly called upon as statesmen to direct their destinies.

It might convey nothing to Sandra Dunn that the tall individual who came towards her with Mr Liscard was one of the most prominent men of the day, but she certainly took a new lease of hope from his expression.

There was nothing personal in it as there had been in Liscard's, but the grey eyes gave more promise.

'I don't quite gather what Miss Dunn's connection with the Finlay Hospital may be,' the other pursued, after the introduction, 'but she seems to be contemplating all sorts of impossible ways of raising a thousand dollars, herself, to extricate it from embarrassment.' He laughed to set her more at ease. 'Now Mr Hickman, have you a post for a new stenographer?'

'It would take some time to earn a thousand dollars even as my stenographer,' the Minister said dryly, seating himself not far from Sandra, 'besides—my dear child—' darting a keen look at her from under those bushy brows, 'don't you know that there is such a thing as moral as well as material economy? Some lives are not worth those lost in the saving of them. Some gains are not worth the cost that has gone to the getting of 'em.—I'm not saying this, of a Hospital of course. Now what's your idea?'

'Oh—I haven't any,' said Sandra twisting the little ring round and round, hard, on her finger. 'I hoped I could have borrowed it, or earned it—but there don't seem no way.'

The two men exchanged a look. There were ways enough to make money if a beauty like this was resolved on it as Miss Dunn seemed to be, but neither of them could fathom her motive, or her plan, or what might be the driving power behind her.

Mr Hickman knew a good deal more of the venture at Finlay than Liscard was aware. Miss Tennant's lucid statement of the case in the Edmonton press a summer ago had not escaped his notice.

'The secret of success in any undertaking of an important nature,' he said, 'is to mature it well beforehand. I doubt if the Hospital Board at Finlay matured its plans long enough. Perhaps one shouldn't expect maturity of anything in this country as yet. We're all so new, railroad, towns, boards and everything. The only thing particularly immature about this, however, strikes me as Miss Dunn herself and her ideas on finance. Now tell me,' winding up kindly, 'how did the trouble arise?'

'Well—' she tried to explain, 'I think it's always been, Mr Hickman. The Hospital was opened before it was ready because there were no funds to finish, and there have been so many sick people in it since then that the money coming in to keep them, either, hasn't been enough. It's in debt now in both ways, and will have to shut up as soon as the sick folk there now can go home.'

'Pity, isn't it?' said Liscard. 'So soon too. Not a very encouraging example for other places.'

'What's to account for it?' asked the Minister frowning; 'crops pretty good this year, aren't they?'

'Very,' Sandra returned. 'But the price of wheat's that low.'

Mr Hickman passed a nervous corded hand over his stiff moustache.

'I'm glad you called my attention to this, Liscard,' he said, 'it wants looking into. The thing's a crying need. Everybody *says* so. Nobody *does* anything. Here we go on talking about it, writing about it if you like, making any amount of journalistic capital out of it, and when somebody actually gets down to work as this Doctor has done, I believe, at Finlay, we let him and his work fall through for want of encouragement. Isn't that about the shape of it, Miss Dunn?'

Sandra's breath came and went spasmodically.

'Say!' she breathed, 'but you know—!'

'I should,' he returned, 'I've been thinking of the West and working for the West, whether my opponents allow that or not, through the best part of a pretty strenuous life, and I know what a man's up against when he sets his hand to public work out here. Give that Doctor of yours at Finlay my very best compliments, and tell him the best of a cropper like this, of a thoroughly bad disillusionment, of a failure and a breakdown is that it enables you to begin all over again with a safe, because sufficiently poor, estimate of what other people, are going to do to second you! Oh, you needn't tell me. I've been through all that, and more, and have still managed to accomplish something. What he's got to do, tell him, is to hew the line straight, let the chips fall how they may.

How many of these infernal dollars do you say you want? A thousand?’

‘A thousand!’ she faltered, and went violently red.

The emphatic statesman shot a look at the other man.

‘How’s that, Liscard? What are you going to put up? And the whole outfit downstairs?’

Liscard looked a bit foolish.

‘Well, anything in reason, I daresay. But Miss Dunn has been through most of us once before. And eight or nine into a thousand is a pretty stiff proposition. Say, you give us a lead of two-thirds?’

‘Look here,’ Mr Hickman pursued, ‘this place they’ve put up at Finlay is the first and only thing of the sort in the province—a Hospital designed for the farmers and built out among them. Two or three other districts are already following suit—as you say it would be a rare job to have the pioneer place fail. Well—’ he used a strong expletive—‘let’s prevent it! What do you say to a trip down there to see the Board? We could spare the time. Why, great guns! what’s this?’

Without a word of warning Sandra had pitched forward in the rocking-chair and fallen heavily to the ground.

‘Where the devil’s the woman who keeps this hotel? The girl has fainted!’

CHAPTER XVII

FRIENDS 'OUTSIDE'

WHEN Sandra recovered her senses under the kindly ministrations of Mrs Anscombe, her wits were wide enough awake at once to beg that a telephone message that she was coming back immediately with good news might be sent through to Dr Liston at Finlay. Nothing more than this, little prepared either George or Miss Norway for the manner of her reappearance. When she and Mr Hickman and the two or three members of his party who could be accommodated in the couple of motor cars readily lent them for the trip, arrived in the hamlet, and went careering at a drunken pace up the Hospital hill, both were too much astonished to waste time on the wildest speculations as to what in the world Sandra had been doing!

Liston went down the footway to greet the motorists, and before he got halfway there, recognised the principal figure among the men who were springing to the ground, and delaying a moment to help her from the foremost car. Good heavens! it was Hickman—what might this not mean?

As she was handed down he came forward

to receive her, reserving everything, as usual until someone should take a lead, and lifted his hat to the little group. The girl's hand had scarcely left Mr Liscard's when she made an impulsive movement to retain it, urging him into the breach of explanations and introductions.

'This is the Doctor,' she said, dragging at his sleeve '—you tell it, Mr Liscard—Mr Hickman—' and the beautiful shy face glowing with the double exhilaration of the drive and of these possibilities, besought their extrication. There was such a rapturous look of triumph in the eyes with which she relinquished every further initiative to George himself, he transferred attention immediately to the courtesies of the moment.

'Surely,' he said, as Liscard introduced him to the Minister, 'if I had known we were to have the honour of a visit from you, Mr Hickman, and these friends of yours, the Committee would like to have received you. As it is I have only to send word down the hill——'

But the other waived this aside.

'Time enough for that later on,' glancing from Liston to the girl's live face at his side, '—take us as you find us, Doctor. We're only out on a pleasure trip this time and it's this young lady's doing that we remembered you had a Hospital here. She tells us you're up against a certain amount of difficulty. Sorry to hear that. Thought

we'd just run over, have a look round, and a chat about it, eh ?'

They turned, the whole group of them, and made their way towards the Hospital.

Liston answered a trifle grimly.

'You're more than welcome, Mr Hickman. No visit could have been better timed.'

He ushered the gentlemen into the hall and closed the door. They glanced round, favourably impressed, and Alma Norway came down the staircase at just that artistic moment when in a play, the 'star' enters the scene. She was introduced, and the Minister's piercing scrutiny seemed better satisfied than ever. Not much difficulty, he thought, in getting at facts from that quarter! She expressed herself delighted to show them over the Hospital, secretly amused at the way Liston was letting them stand about, but Liscard glanced at his watch and remarked that if there was any question of meeting the Committee—

'If there's any question of meeting the Committee, we'll meet it,' Hickman observed, 'but first let's see what there is to see.'

He walked off by himself, took a rapid survey of the first empty room he came to, then wheeled as though to accompany the rest in the little Matron's wake and rejoined Liston lingering for him.

'Time, I suppose, is some object,' he said, 'and no doubt there's a good deal to tell about all this. The whole world they say loves a lover, but the gods I believe love

a fighter. You've had a fight here, Doctor, I can see it in your face—where can we talk?'

Liston showed him the office, and went in search of a second chair. He planted it vis-a-vis with the other but neither of the men sat down. The doctor remained leaning with both hands on the back.

'The fight here,' he returned soberly, 'is finished.'

When Alma Norway, having escorted Liscard and the two other gentlemen round all the wards of the little Hospital, brought them down again to interrupt this interview, Walter Hickman had arrived at an estimate not merely of the facts, but of the man 'back of' the work for which they had nothing but eulogy. This, it had been, he was anxious to get at. The rest could be taken for granted after one look at the Nurse. He had the faculty of attending to one thing, when absorbed apparently in another, and was writing at the desk, as the discussion, reinforced by the entry of the others, took on a new lease. He nodded to show appreciation of something Liston had been saying, and asked how it would be possible, elsewhere, to estimate what he had considered the 'need' for a Hospital in this place.

'What,' put in Liscard, 'might be the population for instance, of Finlay?'

The Doctor told him about eighty or a hundred all told but that such a fact was

neither here nor there so far as Mr Hickman's enquiry went.

'I have been in this district ever since it began to be opened up, gentlemen, and the records of the sort of practice I have got together over an area at least as big as the Weed Inspectorship here, were the only means I had of arriving at any exact idea as to this need, myself. It has been quite as much as I could do to keep pace with the work. But for other localities,' and his manner became animated, (Liston had it so much at heart Finlay should have paved the way), 'statistics of all the accidents, sicknesses and births, especially unattended births, occurring over any given area for any given length of time, would make the point—if it were to be made, or leave the supposed need there, unproved.'

'Quite so, quite so—I think I take you. But it's a pity a place like this should be started if it can't be maintained.' Mr Hickman put up his stylo, and handed Liston a cheque taking no notice whatever of the attempted thanks.

'I don't see that this assistance is likely to be of any permanent use. It only amounts to a plank thrown overboard in aid of financially half-drowned rats. Excuse the metaphor. But in a sparsely populated country like this, with few available methods of local publicity and enormous distances for news to travel, you cannot, surely, depend on voluntary subscriptions. An institution

of any sort has to stand in the middle of a congested stream of city traffic, and advertise itself with a megaphone, for that! I doubt if you were wise to attempt the things you have attempted here in so small a centre of population, but—as you say—you were thinking of the *district*, and that, I conclude is settled up enough to have warranted it. Of course, if the farmers were to pull out in anything like numbers——'

He rose, and glanced out of the window. It seemed a contradiction to all the smiling promise of the land outspread before him, to take such an upshot into serious consideration. A loaded waggon crept slowly over the northward trail towards the village.

'—but I should hope,' he expostulated, 'that's not a very likely contingency?'

George held the thing that meant salvation between his thumb and finger: his eyes almost refused to take in the meaning of the value written there: only Sandra's query of last night, the query he had answered with such seeming harshness, beat in his brain. '*Would a thousand dollars help any?*' Sandra, the girl upon whom he had said he would rely when the bottom of the world fell out, had found and brought him this man, his quick mind and warm heart, and here was the thousand dollars—dropped from heaven! He crushed down a rising emotion that threatened to take from the common everyday sense of the thing, and

forced himself to meet the benefactor on his own ground of rational debate.

'It was not, originally, any part of our scheme here to beg for maintenance,' he said, feeling almost shamefacedly that everything he had done was indeed overpaid by generosity like this, 'it is only because the district does not yet find itself in a position to take up the insurance plan widely enough, that we have reached an impasse. But there are changes pending round about which may very materially influence the prosperity of the district for good—' he outlined their scope and bearing, 'and it is certainly to be hoped that in a few years time the Hospital will be supported without difficulty.'

The Doctor was aware that a good deal of this plain speaking about wheat must occasion if not a remonstrance on the score of exaggeration, at least a protest of some sort, and Mr Henslow, one of the visitors, immediately made it.

'You talk of bad harvests,' he said, 'during the last few years, but that can be only local—perhaps this has been, for some unaccountable reason, an unfortunate area ; as a rule nothing can exceed the heaviness and the excellence of our Alberta crops. I don't like to hear this sort of thing—it's misleading ; gives a bad impression.'

If Liston had been an impatient man he would have exclaimed against the tone of this. As it was, he wished he had what he called a good fire going in his corn cob

that he might settle down at his own deliberate ease to deliver himself of facts, so incontrovertible because so passionless, the Real Estate man would run some risk of a fit. He looked the other steadily in the face, and delivered his broadside.

'Our business men down there,' with a glance towards the hamlet, 'tell me that money was never so scarce in the district before. This, Mr Henslow, after a very fair harvest indeed. The Bank will tell you that never since the branch was opened have deposits been so low. I myself find money very scarce; in fact my practice is reduced one half since thrashing, because people remain at home and suffer rather than pay the price of consultation and drugs. They can't come to Hospital even on an insurance ticket: they can't use the Hospital now it has come to them. I heard only to-day of a case lying in bed two weeks, suffering, rather than afford to send for me!'

Walter Hickman made a forceful gesture, and Liston's face flashed with animation.

'Sir! Have the good folk in the big cities of this West of ours, or in those more prosperous districts we all know exist, any conception of how close we are to famine right here in Finlay—? Right here in this homesteading district where the first of the settler's Hospitals has been built for the comfort and care, first, of the settlers' wives—those women, who, in raising the first Alberta-born generation in this province are

doing at least as much for it as your immigration agencies? Tell me that! The facts may not be good for some publicity purposes, and far be it from me to decry this country or the life to be lived in in '—he put up a hand—'but it is needless to suppress them. Alberta need not be afraid of the truth. Let's thrash this business out to a finish and have things on a footing firm for all the world to test. We're in a desperate way here, and this Hospital will go bump unless someone has nothing to lose by owning to the facts. Nearly every farm in the district is mortgaged up to the hilt, and nothing can be borrowed any further.'

He set a foot upon the seat of the chair and took hold of resolution afresh.

'Mr Hickman's generosity helps us out for the moment. No words can quite express what I feel about that. And if in the course of time this thing gets taken up by the various Rural Municipalities being formed to the north, south, and east of here, our difficulties will be solved—but if it does not? In work of this sort one must be prepared for nine out of every ten irons stuck in the fire coming out stone cold; nothing hampers a cause so much as not being able to lay about one with the simple truth of it.'

But Henslow held to his argument and protested vigorously against undue emphasis on local troubles.

'It cuts direct against the line of policy of

every interest in the country,' he declared, 'and gives rise to big damaging deductions from insufficient premises.'

The debate was an easy one to sustain or prolong on either side; all four men from various points of view were personally interested in it, and Liston made the utmost of his case since one of them, Allan, was a journalist, and if even the most watered down version of the Hospital's cause might creep into anything like widespread print, it would save preposterously roseate headlines anywhere near the Finlay paragraphs.

Perhaps Hickman's conclusions were the most comprehensive as became a statesman who in viewing these lights and shadows saw no more fundamental contradiction than that involved in the simple obverse and reverse of his subject. He gave a good many moments careful thought to the bearings of the agrarian revolution Liston outlined as the best future the district might promise itself. No one more than the Minister held it as part of his creed for the West that the farmers or ranchers should stay on the land they had won, rather than gravitate to the cities once their money was all made, or lost as the case might be.

'Well,' he returned at length, after a few reflective gnawings, 'it seems to me the whole thing is bound to be reduced to a merely temporary thing. That is your idea—what is the idea of tiding over the interval?

Liston stared out across the prairie—the four of them were strung along the office windows regarding the village—. If the Board had had an idea, now was the time to give it utterance! Should he himself be saddled with another twenty-four months of begging? Should he own this seemed to be the only way, but that his practice would go all to pieces were he to commit himself to it as whole-heartedly as was necessary; that he was even then at his wits' end to find fresh assistance, and that two weeks, let alone two years, would exhaust whatever fertility remained to his resource? Was this the sort of thing to admit in the face of Mr Hickman's cheque? He resolved it was not!

His set face with the hard drawn lines about the mouth which made him look years older than he was, remained inscrutable even longer than usual. Then its expression broke up.

'Sir,' he said quietly, 'our insurance scheme here has not answered. We need three hundred annual subscribers of ten dollars each to run this place; the district and village have only been able to put up about seventy. It remains for the Hospital to find the other two hundred and thirty "outside," and this not only for one year, but for two or three—for the length of time, in fact, it may take for us to get on our legs as a ranching country. I can't say more than that I, as Secretary to the Board, will do and must do my utmost to find these outside

subscribers, but I can say that after the experiences we have had in building the place, there should be little doubt but that they will be forthcoming. Begging letter-writing reveals a good deal of the spontaneously generous side of human nature. I should be a rich man now if this thing had been a fraud.'

'Glad to hear you say so! Well, as an old campaigner myself I sincerely hope you'll win. You ought to. Get the thing properly before our philanthropic public, right here in the West, and you will. It sounds simple enough. A couple of hundred friends outside shouldn't be hard to find. Put us all, here, down to start the list. No, no, no thanks! If this imposing file of gentlemen coming up the hill is the Board we shall be very glad to see them but it doesn't seem to me remotely necessary. I'd like to have a chat with that little Matron of yours, and then we must be off. We've none too much time as it is. As for the cheque, account for it as you like; you owe it to Miss Dunn. Not another word, my good Doctor—not another word!'

There was a pleasant confusion as Mr Aldersey, Mr Rogers and the rest of Liston's little Board expressed their sense of indebtedness to Mr Hickman and his friends for having motored over to see the Hospital, for hope beat high in every heart that this summons to meet them meant a turn in the tide of its desperate affairs. That it had, of

course, meant salvation, soon transpired, and there was a very cordial sound of cheering up there on the hill half-an-hour later when the occupants of the two cars clambered back into their seats, the engines were started and with a grunt and a lurch the cumbrous things went buzzing away again on the westward trail to Mooseberry.

The members of the Board turned with every sort of mutual congratulation, and shook hands all round. Faces which had been long for weeks at the mention of Hospital took on again the expressions they had worn at the beginning when hopes first beat high and the heat and dust of the day was yet before them. They had borne a losing fight—if not the brunt of it—with what steadiness might be expected of raw troops faced with heavy odds, but the loss of morale was not so great that this veering of the fortunes of the day had no power to inspirit them afresh. Never had financial reinforcements come up at a more critical moment—it only remained to rush the position with the little handful of subscribers the Doctor talked about, to hold it after that against all comers. . . .

They lingered speculating for quite a while on so extraordinary a stroke of timely luck, then walked off one by one or in friendly twos and threes down the hill after a hearty hand-shake with the Doctor, firmer in the knees than they had felt for a long time, and their heads a little higher in the air. The

group broke up. Edward Aldersey was among the last to remember he had other things to do but stand there staring into the sunset after Walter Hickman's car.

'I suppose,' he admitted regretfully, 'it really was not *quite* a fitting opportunity to mention the organ fund!'

Alma Norway came back after a neck and neck chase with Mr Rogers for her cap, which the prairie wind had torn from her hair and sent soaring like a snowflake after the motorists, as though she had tossed it in the air.

'Say, Doctor,' she panted, 'we mustn't forget this is all Sandra's doing really. Where is Sandra?'

Where indeed?

Sandra was standing by the staircase window irradiated by the level beams of the western sun, as it sank between two purple hills like a ball of gold at the bottom of a chalice.

Her eyes now strained against the sunset glory to follow the motorists careering away over the prairie trail to Mooseberry, now dropped to the figures down there on the hill, and to the two faces which turned and looked up at her.

Liston was coming back: she heard his footstep on the stair and his voice speaking her name.

But she remained where she was and waited, smiling into the unconscious face of the little babe gently rocking on her arm.

THE END